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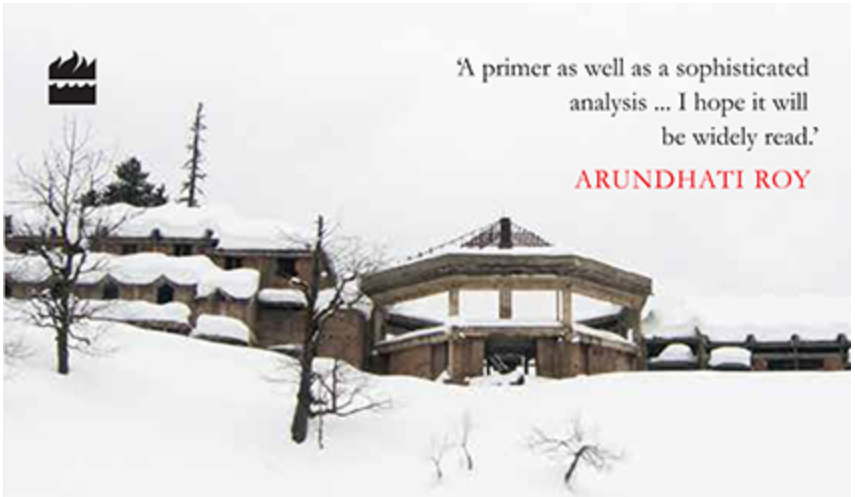
ARUNDHATI ROY

A DESOLATION CALLED PEACE

Voices from Kashmir

Edited by Ather Zia and Javaid Iqbal Bhat



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ATHER ZIA AND JAVAID IQBAL BHAT

HarperCollins *Publishers* India

For Kashmir and its people
In remembrance of Gulam Ahmed Lone and Gulam Ahmed Bhat
[rest in peace and power]

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Introduction

Ather Zia and Javaid Iqbal Bhat

THE entirety of Kashmir, which includes what are currently the two parts of the Valley under the control of India and Pakistan, has been the abode of tragedy for more than five centuries. When the Western colonial power in South Asia was on the rise, Kashmir was being handed over from one tyrannical dynasty to the next. Finally, in 1846, the British colonizers sold the Kashmir Valley along with its sprawling provinces to the Dogra warlords for a sum of 750,000 Nanak Shahi rupees. Kashmir being a British protectorate, the Dogras were required to present annually the Crown with one horse, twelve shawl goats and three pairs of the finest Kashmiri shawls. This historic treaty included the sale of not only the land but also its people.

During the colonial period Kashmir was depicted in scenes full of holiday idyll, wilderness and romance. Photographs from a bygone era are replete with verdant valleys, majestic peaks capped with snow, white waters rushing down mountains, wild flowers and pashmina goats. An odd native or two may be seen lurking, but they are usually shown in service to royals, or the English sahibs.

The 100 years of Dogra rule were ruthless for the majority of the Muslim population.[1] But most colonial administrators and travellers romanticized Kashmir as the 'emerald amongst the pearls', a lush vale nestling amidst gorgeous mountains. While they eulogized Kashmir's rejuvenating natural beauty, some also commented on the cruelty of the ruling kings towards the Muslim population. Yet more often than not, the colonials amply admonished

the Kashmiri natives, mostly poor and broken by the tyrannical rule, for their primitive living and general aura of servitude.[2] Interestingly, even though Kashmiris had been burdened by centuries of slavery, they had a resilient spirit and a long history of resistance. By the early nineteenth century, while India was fighting to oust the British, Kashmiris were fighting to overthrow the Dogra feudal rule.

One of the most iconic grass-roots agitations against Dogra rule occurred in 1931. At that time the Kashmiris rose against unjust laws, which were used to crack down on the population. The prosecution of one of the leaders named Abdul Qadeer led to mass demonstrations. On 13 July 1931, the maharaja's police went on a rampage and ended up killing twenty-two Kashmiris in a dramatic manner. As the time for obligatory prayers approached, one Kashmiri protester rose to give the azan (call to prayer). When he stood up, the Dogra governor Raizada Triloki Chand ordered police to fire upon him. As the wounded man fell in a heap, another Kashmiri stood up to complete the azan and was shot down as well. This went on till twenty-two men were executed in public trying to finish the call to prayer as part of their protest. By 1944, much of the social, religious and economic discontent congealed into the famed Quit Kashmir movement, which demanded a sovereign democracy free from the maharaja's rule.

After the end of British rule in 1947, when the dominions of Pakistan and India came into being, the Kashmir region was forced to choose between joining one of the two dominions. Under the Mountbatten plan, independence was not an option. The Partition had been on religious lines, according to which Kashmir as a Muslim-majority state would go with Pakistan.[3] Meanwhile the Dogra ruler signed a 'standstill agreement' with Pakistan to ensure that essential services, such as trade, travel and communication remained uninterrupted. Pakistan saw this as a forerunner to the accession and its indisputable claim to the region. The Indian leaders had started their diplomacy to acquire Kashmir long before 1947.[4] The majority of Kashmiris at that time preferred to stay independent and not join either of the two countries.[5] From 15 August 1947, when India and Pakistan became two dominions, until 27 October 1947, when Indian military landed, Kashmir was

an independent state. By then the Partition had descended into communal violence. In the region of Poonch in west Kashmir, an armed revolt was building under the name of Azad (Independent) Kashmir Regular Forces to create an independent state.[6] The king suppressed the revolt brutally but the rebels successfully liberated part of the region declaring the Azad (Independent) Kashmir Provisional Government on 24 October 1947. By this time, the communal violence of the Partition reared its head in Kashmir's Jammu province. Approximately 200,000 Muslims were killed in what evidence has shown was essentially an ethnic cleansing, a pogrom endorsed by the Dogra king.[7] Amidst these events, and the fear of losing territory, the maharaja leaned towards acceding to India, the authenticity of which continues to be contested and disputed.[8] The monarch fled Kashmir, and a full-scale war between India and Pakistan ensued. In this anthology, Zahir U Din's essay does delve into some detail around the challenges to the authenticity of the accession.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister, took the issue to the United Nations in January 1948. In its complaint to the United Nations, India reiterated its pledge of conditional commitment to a 'plebiscite or referendum under international auspices' to settle the question of Kashmir. The United Nations brokered a 'ceasefire line', splitting the region between the two nations. The UN-brokered truce resulted in one-third of the territory becoming a semi-autonomous entity within Pakistan known as Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). The remaining two-thirds, including the Valley of Kashmir, was placed under Indian control. In the following years, the United Nations formed the United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan (UNCIP). In 1949, UNCIP recommended handing over the region to a quasi-sovereign power of the plebiscite administrator. The UN crafted several plebiscite models, all of which failed due to the competing preconditions put forth by both India and Pakistan.

In 1951, India concertedly began a policy of legitimizing its government through holding elections. Pakistan protested, arguing that India was planning to finalize the accession. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) warned India that the assembly might conflict with its recommendations still

sub judice and deemed the course of action out of order.[9] The UN dispatched several mediators to investigate the election malpractice and continued exploring options for demilitarization and a plebiscite. After 1954, cold war rivalries froze the Kashmir dispute. Subsequently, the United Nations deployed a military observer group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP), which continues to monitor the region through its forty-four installations. The plebiscite was never held.

The presence of UNMOGIP is a continuous reminder to Kashmiris that the issue is not solved yet and that the UN has promised to hold an internationally monitored plebiscite to decide the fate of Kashmir according to the wishes of its people. In this anthology we see the icon of UN appear as a reminder of the persistent nature of Kashmir as an international dispute awaiting resolution. The UN office in Srinagar has become the hub for demonstrations and submitting of memoranda demanding the right to self-determination. At one point 'a 400,000-strong crowd, marched to the UN office in Srinagar to hand over memoranda demanding plebiscite'.[10] Kashmiris continue to demand that sovereignty be added as an option to reflect their desire for nationhood, a struggle they insist is older than India or Pakistan. In Kashmir, the fraught era between 1947 and 1989 is characterized by undying political aspirations for azadi (independence), a section seeking alliance with Pakistan, aborted movements for liberation from India, and Indo-Pak wars.

Many Indian analysts and policymakers have often projected these seventy-odd years solely in terms of establishing India's governing apparatus, with scant regard to the suppressed political desires of the Kashmiri people. For Indians and many foreigners, this era often appears synonymous with Kashmir's image as the playground of India, an idea that has been majorly peddled by Bollywood movies and reinforced by pro-India politicians active inside Kashmir. However, for Kashmiris, the fortification of the ideological and repressive state apparatuses implemented from New Delhi are a part of India's strategy for tightening its hold on the territory. Even though many Kashmiris have consistently expressed a desire for an independent state, their demand has been reduced to a mere territorial dispute between India and Pakistan, and often completely ignored. Since 1947, political intrigue, arrests and electoral

machinations had become the central motif of India's relationship with Kashmiris, until 1989 – the year when it came fully undone.

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The core attempt of this anthology is to pry open a political wound, to explore the Kashmiri aspiration for azadi as an indigenous and historical demand. This anthology is based on accounts from Indian-administered Kashmir (henceforth referred to as the Kashmir Valley) and will explore the era between 1947 until 1989. Our attempt is to cull an ethnographic memory of what these years were like for the authors, all of whom are Kashmiris; exploring how their political consciousness took root and grew, and what its nature and purpose was.

A range of questions undergirds these essays: what did it mean to grow up as a Kashmiri? What was the meaning of India and Pakistan to Kashmiri life? How was the question of 'Raai Shumari' (UN-mandated self-determination) assimilated into the evolving political scenario and connected to contemporary life? How did the question of independence and the disputed integration with India make itself felt as the Indian government made 'progress and development' the leitmotif of Kashmir's integration? How did the first stirrings of political consciousness begin as India began to undermine the United Nations' political solution for Kashmir? How do the experiences of those years bear upon how most Kashmiris gave popular support to the armed movement in the year 1989 and after? What conclusions can be drawn from those years of growing up amidst the murky local politics and their tenuous relation with whoever held the reins in New Delhi?

How can the years between 1947 and 1989 best be understood, considering the absence of directly visible military violence, as is prevalent now, or militancy, except for a short period in the 1960s? How can we comprehend the era from 1947 till 1989 – which Kashmiris see as 'the lull before the storm' – while in the Indian narrative it is reified as 'peaceful'? By focusing the ethnographic lens on this era, the authors in this collection have tried to provide important insights into understanding the Kashmiri political

aspirations for azadi, which run deep, and how the forceful assimilatory politics propagated by India are viewed on the ground.

This anthology does not claim to offer final answers, but presents a range of individual experiences at best, which are the beginnings of what we hope will be a long reflective period. Each of the pieces showcases how the personal is always deeply political, but in Kashmir, given its fraught history, it is even more so. Most Kashmiris have always considered Indian rule as a 'jabri-qabza', or 'maqbooziyat' (occupation or forced possession) and many scholars openly classify it as a 'military occupation'.[11] Much has been written about how a mix of dubious electoral politics involving rigging, installing pro-India administrators, quashing opposition, incarcerations and increasing militarization has kept Indian governance afloat in Kashmir.

~

For the global community, Kashmir's history between 1947 and 1989 is often depicted in varying degrees of order and chaos, depending upon whether the narrator harbours loyalty to India, Pakistan or Kashmir's independence. A significant body of scholarship exists on various aspects of the provenance and the evolution of the Kashmir dispute. These studies often describe the interregnum between 1947 and 1989 as a dispute between India and Pakistan, largely making pivotal the national positions of the two contesting nations. Contrary to such narratives, this anthology of essays makes central the figure of the Kashmiri, a much-sidelined icon in the dispute. The authors foreground various phases of their life to bring out the nuances which contribute to the complexity of Kashmir as a territory and the unceasing demand of Kashmiris for its sovereignty.[12]

We invited a number of Kashmiris, gender and religion no bar, to write for the volume, but we did not have control over who finally chose to contribute to the collection. This project, which has been in the making for more than four years, survived some writers losing their manuscripts to the 2014 floods, which was a major setback. While there has been considerable political, media and historical analysis, and literary writing that claims to speak of or speak for

Kashmir and Kashmiris, this volume is the first one to focus on culling out the lived experience of native authors during a specific era from 1947 till the start of the armed struggle. We believe that it is important to understand this era to provide context to the continuing political resistance in Kashmir.

The essays are driven by political understandings born of personal experiences rooted in the years between 1947 and 1989, a period which, in the Indian narrative, is erroneously termed as 'peaceful'. As a collective voice, the anthology serves two purposes. First, it contributes to destabilizing the official and nationalistic histories of both India and Pakistan. These native voices create a much-needed counter-memory, recorded by the people who have lived the years, and are part of the everyday grass-roots resistance as it exists on the ground. This collection foregrounds the indigenous voice of the subalterns whose personal and lived histories have often been displaced, delegitimized, marginalized and criminalized in this dispute.

In the formal Indian history, native Kashmiris are often infantilized and seen as mere pawns on the chessboard of big politics in the subcontinent. Specifically, Pakistan is projected as directing Kashmiri people's actions and demands. Kashmiris are depicted as not having a sense of the past, nor being committed or united in a political vision of their future. That Kashmiris are demanding not only the UN-mandated self-determination but are also committed to the demand for a sovereign nation, which they were seeking before India and Pakistan emerged, is a perspective that has been well and truly erased from the official Indian narrative. In some measure, the personal narratives in this book counter this naive portrayal of Kashmiris, presenting a direct challenge to the histories that have been structured post-Partition.

The second purpose this anthology serves is to shed light on the notion of 'peace' between the years 1947 and 1989 in Kashmir. In the Indian narrative, this period is generally projected as a largely peaceful cohabitation of different faiths and ideologies inside the state of Jammu and Kashmir, wedded to the idea of development and its 'final integration' with India. The term 'Kashmiriyat' also makes its entry during this era. The philosophical paradigm of Kashmiriyat, an Urdu derivative clearly of political import, emerged on the Kashmiri political firmament only after 1947. In the ensuing years, this term

gained traction because 'pro-India' Kashmiri and Indian politicians used it as a functional aspect of India's secular aspirations.

Deployed through the ideal of Kashmiri syncretism, Kashmiriyat has been used to prop up India's plural existence within the Valley and outside. This is not to say that different religious communities did not exist together in the Valley, but they fundamentally shared a fraught and unequal power dynamic. Against this backdrop, the Indian narrative presents the rupture of 1989 as if it were an anomaly, born of an array of causes – often generalized as misgovernance, rigged elections, or unemployment. Most important of all the causes is the narrative of instigation from across the Line of Control (LoC), which is mostly subsumed under Pakistani interference, thus also negating the existence of Kashmiris in what is known as Azad Kashmir who have been major contributors in the fight against India.

The essays paint a vivid picture of the political phases that the Valley has experienced. Professor Gulam Rasool Malik brings to life his early years around 1953, when Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah, then the prime minister of Jammu and Kashmir, was arrested. Malik's childhood experiences are not very different from anything a child in Kashmir might witness today; only the names of the political actors have changed. His grandfather's comment about the Sheikh's politics is telling of a larger sentiment held by many Kashmiris today. Malik's grandfather tells the little Malik that had the Sheikh handled the situation well in 1947, Jammu and Kashmir would have been free [from India]. This analysis stands true for most authors in this anthology and those who have previously written about it.[13]

In the 1940s, Sheikh Abdullah was seen as an unrelenting figure of Kashmiri nationalism. He was the founder of the National Conference party, which in 1931 began as the Muslim Conference. He became the first Muslim prime minister of Jammu and Kashmir. His political missions ranged from spearheading the Quit Kashmir movement against the Dogra warlords to forming the Plebiscite Front to demand the right of self-determination for Kashmiris. His political ambitions and tribulations have been commented upon by most authors in this anthology—pointing to the importance of his stature and its subsequent decline. The Indian government ousted Sheikh

Abdullah from his position as prime minister of Kashmir in 1953, after which he was incarcerated multiple times. His increasing acquiescence to Indian policies cost him the carte blanche that the Kashmiri masses had granted him. Since his death in 1982, the public discourse around his legacy has become deeply problematic because of his support to 'ilhaaq' (accession to India). Kashmiris opine that the Sheikh betrayed his own legacy of striving for Kashmir's sovereignty and the accession was largely engineered on the basis of his friendship with and personal loyalty to Pandit Nehru. Such is the level of hostility from people that since 1989 his mausoleum had to be put under security for fear of being vandalized.

In his essay, the reputed poet of the Kashmiri language and avid folklorist Zareef Ahmed Zareef revisits his youth and illustrates in both prose and poetry the dynamics around the plebiscite movement, the arrest of Sheikh Abdullah and the installation of Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed by New Delhi, in what is seen as a de facto coup by India. Other contributors in this anthology including Mohammad Junaid, Mir Khalid and Zahir U Din, have analysed this period extensively in their essays. This period is seen as politically transitive through regime change and incarcerations, through which Kashmir was demoted from an autonomous sovereignty to a de facto state within India.

An event involving my [Ather Zia's] maternal grandfather Gulam Ahmed Lone also points to how political repression was being institutionalized to smoothen the edgy details of Kashmir's political history so that it could fit the 'feel-good' narrative of assimilation and integration with India. A scriptwriter in the J&K information department, my grandfather and his colleague were commissioned to document the families of the surviving members of the 1931 martyrs and those who had been killed during the roti agitation, which began in May 1932, in Jammu. Their research revealed that the families of the 1931 martyrs were destitute, and there was evidence of hatred of Muslims underlying the roti agitation.[14] These reports were unpalatable to the government, which did not want revelations that did not match their official narratives. The authors were ordered to appear before Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, the then prime minister of Jammu and Kashmir, and apologize. Both suspected that they would have been asked to change their analysis. My

grandfather did not apologize and never returned to his job. Needless to say, the reports were never published. This is just one small personal example of the intense efforts that the administration in Kashmir was involved in at all levels to make history sterile, and suppress facts that would project Kashmir as anything but compliant to Indian ministrations and in sync with its perceived ideals.

In anthropologist Mona Bhan's essay, Kashmir emerges as an independent aspiration of not only Muslims but that of Kashmiri Pandit Hindus. She writes about the unexplored nuances of her family dynamics, which reflected the larger differences that undergirded the Pandit and Muslim communities and were exacerbated by Indian policies. In her account, journalist-writer Anuradha Bhasin recalls the tumultuous events of 1984, which made her conscious of the mutual *otherness* between Hindus, Kashmiris (Pandits and Muslims) and Sikhs. She reflects on the peculiar history that Jammu and Kashmir share as provinces that are geographically and culturally different. Journalist-activist Zahir U Din threads key moments in Kashmir history to illustrate the complexity of Kashmir's political legacy and deep-rootedness of the aspirations of sovereignty of its people and the deep affective relation with Pakistan which should not be reductively read as being against Kashmir's independence.

Anthropologist-essayist Mohammad Junaid adopts a fascinating methodology to excavate Kashmir's deep-rooted resistance to India. He makes Akhtar Mohiuddin, a well-known Kashmiri fiction writer, a symbolic chronicler of the alternative history of Kashmir. Making Akhtar's writings pivotal, Mohammad illustrates how they are different in tone and tenor from that of the official historiography of Kashmir. While literary historians have tended to dismiss Akhtar for his 'tendentious plot', Mohammad uses his writing to trace the precariousness of Kashmiri lives post-1947 within the Indian apparatus. Mohammad hails Akhtar as a native witness who is singularly engaged in the 'search for an ethical ideal to ground dilemmas of existence in Kashmir'.

Novelist Mirza Wahid travels through the back alleys of his idyllic childhood. His laid-back meanderings and coming of age narrative around

1989 end in crackdowns, identification parades, and killings. These heartaches culminated in Waheed's epic novel *The Collaborator*, which is a poignant tribute to the pathos of his homeland. Writer-memoirist Khalid Mir deftly weaves together his family's conversations, and things heard on the street; both of which were ensconced in increasing militarization by India. A former militant turned human rights activist Abdul Qadeer's essay, adapted from an interview by Nawaz Gul Qanungo, recounts his past as a combatant, and his arrest and torture by the Indian forces. He gives a first-hand account of the historical motivations that became instrumental in the 1980s in goading Kashmiri men like him towards guerilla warfare.

Novelist Shahnaz Bashir speaks about life both at home and outside, which as a young boy in the 1980s he did not comprehend but now analyses through the events that followed the armed struggle. Journalist Syed Zafar Mehdi revisits his childhood, especially the time he spent being educated as a young boy in Aligarh and how his Kashmiriness took shape and his aspiration for azadi was honed. In human rights activist Khurram Parvez's narrative (which has been adapted by Haziq Qadri from an interview), we see how the Gaw Kadal massacre, in addition to the general atmosphere of Tehreek (movement), becomes pivotal in rousing his political consciousness. The massacre at Gaw Kadal is invoked at several places in this anthology. Kashmiris see the Gaw Kadal massacre as a singular event, which marked the increasing use of military and paramilitary forces by the Indian government. On 20 January 1990, when the armed struggle was barely a year old, the troopers of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) began a crackdown in an old city locality.[15] They combed through houses, not only rounding up men for identification parades and conducting arrests but also molesting women. Anticipating protests, curfew was imposed by Jagmohan, who on 19 January, barely twenty-four hours earlier, had taken the oath as governor. Despite the curfew, people came out in a peaceful procession, protesting the abuses by the government forces. Khurram's grandfather, who was one of the protestors, was killed along with fifty others when the paramilitary police force opened fire on the procession.

The invocation of Gaw Kadal massacre reflects Kashmiris' widely held belief about how the events in January 1990 were orchestrated by the Indian

government under Governor Jagmohan to intensify its counter-insurgency policies and nip the armed movement in the bud. Jagmohan's oath-taking ceremony was accompanied by not-so-veiled threats to Kashmiris to behave or 'he would lose the card of peace'.[16] Zahir U Din in his essay talks about this event in detail. The governorship of Jagmohan had been only some hours old when the brutal spectacle of the Gow Kadal massacre began, which was followed by a full and final spurt in the mass migration of around 90,000 Kashmiri Pandit Hindus.[17] Soon after, the government stepped up the violence against civilians, combatants and unarmed protestors, and implemented the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA).[18] Thus, the figure of the Indian soldier became a persistent and dreaded motif of tyranny for Kashmiris.[19]

Since 1947, the Indian government has deployed both what the French philosopher Louis Althusser has identified as the 'ideological state apparatus' and the 'repressive state apparatus' to manufacture an atmosphere of compliance in Kashmir. However, resentment of Indian rule and resistance to the machinations of New Delhi has ensured that the seeds of an armed struggle were sown. The Kashmiri novelist Akhtar Mohiuddin – as Mohammad Junaid reminds us – was prescient in dedicating his 1975 novel *Jahnamuk Panun Panun Naar* to that one Kashmiri youth, 'who will fire the first bullet to set things right in Kashmir'. So, a future where Kashmiris would resort to extreme measures against India was not a surprise for Kashmiris who had been witnessing the dismal political scene post-1947. Indeed, these collected essays show that the situation that unfolded in Kashmir was inevitable, and only a matter of time. Thus, seeking liberation from India is not to be understood as the failure of Indian democracy, or alienation of Kashmiris, and it is certainly not a governance issue, or one of election mismanagement. Increasingly since the 1930s, Kashmiris have been single-minded in achieving democratic sovereignty, as these essays point out.

The question of how Kashmiris position themselves vis-à-vis Pakistan is important and crucial in understanding the resistance in Kashmir.[20] As the essays in this volume will reveal, there is a deeply affective relation between the two entities, which often manifests itself during cricket matches when most Kashmiris side with Pakistan, a reality that Shahnaz Bashir brings home in his

essay. Bashir mentions his aunt who becomes emblematic of the Kashmiri–Pakistan relation when she places the holy Quran on the TV to invoke blessing for the Pakistani cricket team. Such sentiments abound in Kashmir with some people even pledging charity or waging bets on Pakistan's win. There is also an occasional flag waving by protesting crowds especially in the old Srinagar where a section of Pakistani loyalists remains strong even if majority sentiments have sufficiently travelled towards the goal of azadi.

Mir Khalid has provided a reflection on this in his essay where he talks about the historic politics of 'Sher' ('lion', the name for the followers of Sheikh Abdullah) and 'Bakras' ('goats', a derogatory name for the followers of Mirwaiz Moulvi Farooq) in downtown Srinagar and similar allegiances in rural areas. Farooq was from the Mirwaiz (head-preacher) family of Kashmir, known to have strong allegiance to Pakistan as compared to Abdullah who had lent his support to India in 1947. These nuanced readings of lived histories pose challenges to the blanket Indian narrative where the relation of Kashmiris with Pakistan is always portrayed as inherently deviant or 'traitorous' and thus an anomaly.

Most analysts in India portray Pakistan as never having had anything to do with the Valley, which is a sweeping erasure of Kashmiris' political, cultural and geographical history. In Kashmir, there are individuals and extended families that have had ties with this cultural region even before it became Pakistan and who retain their affective ties after it became a country. There were not only family connections but also linkages of trade and education. Before 1947, most Pakistani cities were home to Kashmiri businessmen and students since the region was geographically and culturally closer to Kashmir than what is now India. These connections continue to resurface after the passing of six generations. The blinkers manufactured by India to hide this history are a great disservice not only to Kashmiris but also to the Indian masses. It is important for Indians to acknowledge and understand Kashmir as a region in its accurate historical context, and not ignore the important ties of its past which have a bearing on the future of the entire subcontinent. Today considering the statistics, surveys and popular opinion, most Kashmiris want

independence, but Pakistan remains an affective and political ally for many Kashmiris, and a modest percentage favour accession to it.

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Since 1989, the Indian administration in Kashmir has faced an outright challenge due to the rise of the armed Kashmiri militancy. A popular uprising, which most Kashmiris had subscribed to, began even as India increased its troops to more than 700,000 in the region. Draconian laws like the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958, were implemented, tightening the Indian military's grip and repressing any expression of the sentiments of self-determination and independence. There is roughly one Indian soldier for every seventeen Kashmiris, making Kashmir one of the most densely militarized zones in the world. The level of impunity shown by the Indian troops has resulted in gross human rights violations. Human rights organizations claim that to date, more than 70,000 Kashmiris, both combatants and non-combatants, have been killed, and more than 8,000 have disappeared; and rape, as a Human Rights Watch report states, has been used as a weapon of war.[21]

AFSPA has given Indian troops powers which facilitate and legitimize arbitrary arrest and detention and extrajudicial executions. Under AFSPA, the Indian troops can 'arrest without warrant, any person who has committed a cognizable offence or against whom a reasonable suspicion exists that he has committed or is about to commit a cognizable offence and may use such force as may be necessary to effect the arrest'.[22] Almost everyone in Kashmir is under reasonable suspicion, and hence never far from being shot or 'disappeared', or incarcerated, raped, or beaten. These have become common stories, and every Kashmiri household bears them as painful legacies.[23] A state of siege exists in Kashmir, where civilians are under as much surveillance as militants, if not more. Bunkers, lookouts, army camps, patrol units and mine-resistant armoured vehicles have become part of the landscape.

Post-2008, armed militancy had receded while the freedom movement took a major turn towards civilian uprisings, including public demonstrations.

Also, a new generation of protesters emerged, known as the sangbaaz ('those who throw stones'). These protestors engage in pitched street battles with Indian troops, armed only with stones. The sangbaaz are just boys with no special combat training. Their qualifications at best include being able-bodied and their utter fury at Indian hegemony. While the stone-throwing has been called the Kashmiri Intifada, alluding to Palestinian protests, this mode of combat is not new in Kashmir. Poet-folklorist Zareef Ahmed Zareef traces the origins of stone-throwing to the sixteenth century when Mughal rulers from Delhi annexed Kashmir. It is said that at that time, bands of Kashmiri men called 'dilawars' (brave hearts) would fight the Mughal soldiers by throwing stones at them. As these essays will reveal, stone throwing and street protests have never ceased in Kashmir and have been a constant expression of political resistance.

In the summer of 2016, nearly 556 years later, Kashmiris once again fought a people's battle to liberate their homeland from yet another form of protracted rule from Delhi.[24] While the Indian state and media called the protests 'unrest' or a 'law and order problem', Kashmiris were unanimously calling it an uprising. It began in the evening of 7 July when, along with the much-needed showers breaking a hot summer, there came the news that Burhan Wani, a popular militant, had been killed by Indian forces. Fifteen-year-old Burhan had taken to militancy in 2010 in the aftermath of another major grass-roots uprising in which more than 112 Kashmiris were killed and more than 2,000 wounded.[25] Burhan had been compelled to take up arms after severe harassment from the army and police; his brother was also later killed.

Over six years, Burhan had become the face of the Kashmiri armed movement. Across the valley, the young and old idolized him. Fan pages in his honour had sprouted all over social media. Burhan was from Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (HM), a militant outfit that supports a merger with Pakistan, but even independence-loving Kashmiris were his admirers. Since the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) gave up arms in 1994, and there has been extreme suppression of other local militant outfits, HM remains the only functional militant group for the Kashmiri youth like Burhan who are forced into combat. Thus, joining the ranks of HM cannot only be read in the

reductionist manner of the Kashmiri boys fighting for accession to Pakistan or pan-Islamism. Burhan's killing unleashed a volcanic surge in anger against India that has refused to recede since.[26]

In the 2016 uprising, more than 100 people were killed, more than 10,000 wounded, and organs perforated by pellets from shotguns. The Indian government has authorized the use of pellet shotguns, originally made to hunt animals, as a non-lethal method of crowd control. These guns have caused massive injuries to the eyes and faces of protestors, as well as causing fatalities. International human rights organizations have denounced the disproportionate use of force against protestors who at the most might carry stones. Such has been the degree of lethal force used both on protestors and non-protestors that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) demanded the right to enter Kashmir to investigate the human rights abuses committed by the Indian forces.

The months-long curfew continued off and on. The Valley was an open prison. One might imagine that civilians are diffident around soldiers, but it is not so. The fear of being killed is gone, and so is the fear of being maimed for life. Kashmiris are now demanding the right to self-determination in hand-to-hand street combat. The three decades of intense militarization has made facing danger second nature to Kashmiris. They have buried and lost too many, they say. The government forces quelled the protests with disproportionate force. Hospitals across Kashmir were full of the wounded, both protestors and those who were not even part of the demonstrations. And not only men, but Kashmiri women too have increasingly joined the protests and street battles.[27] Such has been the level of women's participation that a local pro-India politician even used it as an excuse to impose night curfew. He said that women were organizing after they were done with domestic chores, which made it imperative to impose the curfew at night. Such is the constitution of the crowd on the streets of Kashmir. Yet, the Indian government adamantly portrayed the demonstrators as hired hands, criminals, unemployed drugs addicts or unruly kids. No amount of evidence or denouncement of this allegation from Kashmiris allays the Indian narrative, simply because it does not suit their political ends. The Indian state continues to undermine all

modes of Kashmiri resistance, either claiming that it is being solely instigated by Pakistan or linking it to the political disenchantment of Kashmiris with India.[28]

At the time of writing the initial draft of this introduction in the autumn of 2016, following the lifting of the curfew, everyday life in Kashmir, including schools, trade and other economic activities, was shaping around the boycott known locally as the hartal. It is a historical mode of civil disobedience observed by Kashmiris. Often debated as economically and socially unviable, hartal has emerged as the only option through which most Kashmiris can participate in the civil disobedience movement without resorting to street protests. While street battles ebb and flow, Kashmiris have readied themselves for a long resistance to India. The 2016 mass uprising saw the proliferation of young Kashmiris fighting for freedom: chests heaving, daring the Indian troops and demanding liberation for Kashmir, nothing less. There has been a marked increase in young men from upper middle class and educated families joining the armed militancy.[29]

In September, two months after Burhan's killing, as the curfew and protests entered their third month, Sayar Shiekh, a fifteen-year-old boy, became another casualty in what has been called India's 'war on people'. The events preceding Sayar's killing are a telling prediction of the everyday tragedy that Kashmir lives. Sayar's parents say he rose early to take a bath, and then wore new clothes because he had finally decided to join what turned out to be his first and last protest.[30] Sayar is not an anomaly. In a similar manner, Khusboo Jan, a young girl, who would lead protests along with her siblings, was killed while chanting 'Hum Kya Chahte: Azadi'.[31] In another incident, a journalist asked two young boys who were wounded in one eye each by a pellet shotgun if they would continue fighting the Indian forces with stones; they replied, 'Why not, we still have one eye left'. Such is the sentiment of resistance against Indian rule.

These young Kashmiris are symbolic not only of India committing human rights abuses, but more significantly, the country's deep neglect of the demand for Kashmir's sovereignty and self-determination.[32] The continuing resistance in Kashmir, and the relentless struggle for self-determination and

independence from India is not only a political fact but has become part of the cultural legacy of Kashmiris. In 2018, the OHCHR released a report documenting the human rights abuses in Jammu and Kashmir, Azad Kashmir and the Gilgit–Baltistan region, which also reiterated the need to recognize the right to self-determination for the people of these areas.[33]

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In the Arms of Fire

Prof. G.R. Malik*

My first conscious encounter with my motherland took place when I was seven years old. Until then, life had mostly consisted of pleasant and intoxicating daydreaming. All my leisure hours – and it seemed there was enough leisure then – were given to the heady pastimes of a village childhood: playing games, climbing trees and stealing the eggs of birds, along with lots and lots of hopscotch and tipcat.

Into this idyll came 9 August 1953. I had just been admitted to a private school run by the revivalist organization known as Jamaat-e-Islami [Jamaat for short]. Like many modern Islamic revivalist movements, this one would also lose its way in the desert sands of electoral politics, but at that time it was fired by an idealistic fervour to usher in a golden era of grace and moral purification.

Our first lessons under the benign and affectionate supervision of Hakeem Ghulam Nabi were uplifting and soul-nourishing. My school lessons were supported by Grandpa's lessons at home in Sa'di and Attar. And then suddenly came the upheaval, which jolted my cradle of joy and sweetness.

It happened on a warm August afternoon. I was watching Mother pick vegetables in a small garden near our home. On the south-east, the road leading to Shopian skirted the garden. On this road appeared a huge procession, shouting loud and furious slogans. I asked my mother what it was and she told me, 'Son, our leader, Sher-i-Kashmir has been deposed from premiership and arrested by the Indians.' 'Why?' I asked. Mother said,

'Because he wants azadi for us.' In the evening, Grandpa commented, 'Had Abdullah not mishandled the situation in 1947, we would have been free!' Little could I understand, much less foresee, that henceforth I, like every other Kashmiri, was going to live the paradox outlined in my mother's simplistic tale and Grandpa's sober comment.

After the evening meal, my family talked of protesters having been fired on in the Shahr (city) – Srinagar. People had fallen to the bullets just as they had fallen during the uprising of 13 July 1931. All this disturbed my sleep. I dreamt of the procession shouting slogans: *Udhampur jaengay, Sher-i-Kashmir ko laengay!* ('We shall travel to Udhampur and set the Lion of Kashmir free from the prison there and get him back.') *Yeh mulk hamara hai iska faislah hum karengay!* ('This land is ours and we shall decide its fate.')

When I woke up the next morning, the familiar surroundings seemed to have undergone an uncanny transformation. The paddy fields wore a sombre look. The willow trees, which had fanned our cheeks so gently began to emit hot air. Strange yearnings began to stir in my breast. I felt I was being reborn. That day, there were more protests. My playmates and I walked with the protesters in a state of elation, even though we hardly understood what was going on. As the procession wound through the marketplace, young men in their late twenties would stand up and ask the protesters to stop and sit down. Then they would get on to the verandas of the shops and make short, fiery speeches. 'Freedom', 'slavery', 'breach of trust' and such words and expressions were bandied about.

The euphoria continued for about a month or so. Many people died and many more were arrested. Then, a mysterious calm began to descend. Schools and colleges reopened quietly. Markets became busy again. This was followed by a strange flurry of activity: building road, digging canals, community radio entertainment and musical concerts. These musical concerts were held at all the main places of the city and in the towns and villages. Admission to them was free and sumptuous refreshments were served to the participants. Jashn-i-Kashmir was the name given to this ubiquitous musical extravaganza. It has now become a memory of the past, although remnants of it resurface in changed form whenever circumstances take an unusual turn.

The turbulence of August 1953 began to subside and within two or three years, all was well. Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, the new premier of Jammu and Kashmir, was projected as the messiah of the poor and downtrodden. It seemed he had inexhaustible and unaccounted treasures at his disposal and conferred lavish gifts and rewards of all kinds – contracts, employments, cash rewards – on whomsoever he pleased. The common Kashmiri seemed to have become lackadaisically carefree. Sheikh Abdullah and those of his associates who had stood by him in 1953 continued to move in and out of prison. It was during one such stint that Mirza Afzal Baigh – Sheikh Abdullah's right-hand man – laid the foundations of the Plebiscite Front. This significant event, however, failed to cause any visible ripples in the placid surface of Bakshi-ruled Kashmir.

Several fabricated cases, including the notorious Kashmir Conspiracy case, were filed against Sheikh Abdullah.[1] His statements were circulated on a fairly large scale by the publicity wing of the Plebiscite Front, so widely that even a schoolboy like me with no political inclinations or ambitions had access to shabbily printed copies. These statements, made in chaste and refreshing Urdu, were bold, dauntless and sincere, and went on – slowly and gradually – to build a heroic image of Sheikh Abdullah in my imagination and, I believe, in the imaginations of many other Kashmiris.

Bakshi's Kashmir, however, remained ostensibly unruffled until 1963, when Nehru launched the Kamaraj plan. This was a unique device invented by India's Hamlet to get rid of undesirable political elements, among whom Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, figured prominently. It was the Tamil Nadu (then Madras) chief minister, Kumarasami Kamaraj Nadar, who proposed the plan. Under the plan the senior ministers were to resign and revert to doing organizational work. No sooner did Bakshi resign, apparently in deference to Nehru's wishes, than an event of extremely serious nature took place. The Holy Relic of the Prophet mysteriously disappeared from the shrine at Hazratbal in December 1963. It shook the whole of the Valley and the Muslim-dominated areas of Jammu. Within twenty-four hours, life had been totally paralysed. Many people, including decrepit men, women and children, came on to the streets despite the severe cold and raised slogans of freedom, demanding the

immediate release of Sheikh Abdullah – the symbol and spearhead of the freedom struggle.

It is hard to capture in words the enthusiasm of those days. The atmosphere was surcharged with expectations. Freedom, as never before or since, seemed around the corner. Delhi was rudely shaken. Nehru deputed his confidant, Lal Bahadur Shastri, to visit the Valley and assess the situation. The puppet regime of Shams-ud-Din, which had been installed by Bakshi, was deposed and G.M. Sadiq appointed the new chief minister of the state. The holy relic was found and replaced as mysteriously as it had disappeared.

Sadiq's first major decision was to constitutionally integrate the state further with India; the nomenclatures of Sadr-i-Riyasat (president of the state) and Wazir-e-A'zam (prime minister) were dispensed with and replaced by those of 'governor' and 'chief minister,' as in other Indian states. His second major decision was to withdraw all cases against Sheikh Abdullah and his associates, including the Kashmir Conspiracy case.

Sheikh Abdullah was set free after nearly eleven years of imprisonment. He undertook a triumphal tour of the state. From Jammu he travelled to Baderwah and Kishtwar and thence to the Valley. We were undergraduate students then at the Government Degree College, Anantnag. So overwhelming was our enthusiasm to receive the Sheikh that we went to the local office of the Plebiscite Front and prevailed upon its leaders that as Sheikh sahib reached the outskirts of the town from Dooru, the route that he had taken after crossing the Jawahar Tunnel, the first welcoming arch to meet him was to be set up by the college students and the second by the local unit of the Plebiscite Front.

When the Sheikh finally reached the town, it seemed that south Kashmir had poured out its whole population to welcome its hero. Shair Bagh, the adjoining school compound and the roads were packed to full capacity. Finding no place on the ground, people had occupied all the available trees and the hill on the east was covered with watchers. I had wriggled myself into the crowd and managed to reach the front rows to get a closer look at my hero. As the crowd surged forward, so forceful and heavy was the push that I felt crushed and gasped for breath. Fortunately, the late Ghulam Nabi Hagroo, a Plebiscite Front leader, spotted me and had me rescued.

Then came the awaited moment. Sheikh sahib rose from behind the dais like the rising sun. Dressed in a long white pashmina gown, he looked like a saint descending from above to rescue us, hapless Kashmiris. Nor did his words belie his appearance. He spoke slowly in measured and firm tones:

> If India says Kashmir is ours, why and what for have these millions of people turned up here? *Yeh mumkin hai ki aftaab magrib se tuloo hojaye aur mashriq main ghuroob hojaye magar yeh mumkin nahi ki Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah Kashmiriyon ke huqooq ke saath sawda karey.*
>
> (It may be possible that the sun rises from the west and sets in the east but it will never be possible that Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah will barter away the rights of the Kashmiris.)

Sheikh sahib had planned to spend the night at Anantnag and proceed to Srinagar the next morning. It was announced that he would address the people of Bijbehara in the Padshahi Bagh at nine the next morning. I found it hard to sleep that night. Early the next morning, I had a quick breakfast and walked 3 km to reach Padshahi Bagh in time to listen to Sheikh sahib again, little knowing that the first disillusionment was about to open up cracks in my dream.

As Sheikh sahib rose to speak, there was the usual slogan shouting. The Holy Relic agitation had thrown up a new political force under the leadership of the young Moulvi Muhammad Farooq. It was called the Action Committee. Units of this fairly well-represented political forum had been set up in all major places. As slogan shouting began, a local activist of the Action Committee also raised a slogan hailing the committee. Sheikh sahib raised his hand, his face red with anger, and shouted down the person who had raised the slogan. 'Sit down and be quiet. Only one force counts here and that is the Plebiscite Front and one person shall succeed me: Mirza Afzal Baigh'. It was clear that Sheikh sahab did not want any rival political force to emerge in opposition to him.

From Bijbehara, Sheikh sahib proceeded to Srinagar, receiving the same enthusiastic welcome at every township and hamlet on his way. The biggest turnout and the most lavish reception was, however, reserved for Srinagar city. So overwhelming was the reception that even Delhi seemed to wake up and take a second look at its placid stance on Kashmir. Within months, Nehru had

allowed Sheikh Abdullah to travel to Pakistan to see if something could be done to resolve the 'Kashmir Problem'. In Pakistan, Sheikh Abdullah had parleys with President Ayub Khan, his young and ebullient Foreign Minister Z.A. Bhutto, and the leaders of Azad Kashmir. But even as the thaw seemed to have set in and expectations rose to an unprecedented pitch, Nehru died, on 27 May 1964. Sheikh Abdullah rushed back in tears amid the ominous gloom.

Meanwhile, Kashmir's euphoria ebbed predictably. G.M. Sadiq continued to consolidate the Indian position in Kashmir. Although personally very clean (perhaps the cleanest chief minister Kashmir has had since 1947), he was ruthless towards any anti-India sentiment. What made things worse was that a clique of rotten and corrupt advisers who virtually ran the government surrounded him. I was still in college doing my BA when Sadiq's rule was in its heyday.

An event of some significance in my life occurred around this time. In my village, Arwani, there is a custom which continues to this day: any young man who has some knowledge of the Quran and the Sunnah is asked to speak to the Friday congregation in the mosque during the Friday prayers. On a Friday, I spoke to the congregation. I had done it many times before and did it many times after. But on that day, some vested interests in the village, who had a personal score to settle with me, prepared a baseless and sinister report and involved the local police, with whom they were always hand in glove. They had me arrested without any warrant. For a couple of weeks, I had to remain in custody in Awantipur police station. Luckily, the officer who had me in his keeping turned out to be a wonderful human being. On my first day, he was angry and stern: 'Why do you displease your elders and threaten their leadership in the village?' he asked, and kicked me down. But within two days, he had relented and even started learning English from me. In the evenings, he had me read him poetry and explain it to him. He grew so fond of me that in two weeks' time I was allowed to go home.

In 1965, Kashmiris experienced a new phenomenon – armed rebellion against the Indian occupation made its first appearance. Unknown persons fired upon Indian military installations and police posts. People talked of mujahideen coming from Azad Kashmir to liberate the occupied land. G.M.

Sadiq's government announced prizes for those who could help arrest the armed men, and indeed, opportunistic denizens of Kashmir got many of these 'liberators' arrested for paltry monetary awards. The armed rebellion led to the heightening of tensions between India and Pakistan so that war broke out between the two countries in August 1965.

Before long, Indian troops had crossed the international border, and were threatening to overrun Lahore. Pakistan responded with all its might. There was heavy loss on either side. Finally, upon the intervention of the UN and Premier Kosygin of the then Soviet Union, the war ended. Kosygin organized a conference of Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri and President Ayub Khan of Pakistan at Tashkent and an agreement was signed. Unfortunately, Lal Bahadur Shastri died suddenly at Tashkent itself.

In the summer of 1966, I entered the University of Kashmir to pursue a master's course in English. Discontent still simmered among my brethren; our sense of identity was lost, and we felt our hopes had been belied. Sheikh Abdullah continued to move in and out of prison but the passion and excitement that his presence had once generated seemed to have faded away. I heard him exclaim in one of his Friday speeches at Hazratbal:

'Meri qauom, qaum nahin, murdah lashon ka eik dheir hai.

(My people are not a nation; it is a heap of dead bodies.)

After completing my master's, I was appointed a lecturer in English. What had happened in 1965 and since had convinced me that no meaningful change, to say nothing of a revolution, was possible in Kashmir without a radical transformation of heart and mind, and building of model human character based on such transformation. The most fundamental task of a lover of Kashmir was, therefore, to work for his own inner purification and seek to bring about the same change in others. This opinion was confirmed by the momentous events of 1971 and 1972.

In 1971, trouble began in East Pakistan after Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was denied his due as the leader of the majority party thrown up by the Pakistani general elections. India intervened and war broke out, resulting in the

dismemberment of Pakistan and the birth of Bangladesh. I distinctly remember the evening of the fateful day when over 90,000 Pakistani soldiers, led by Lt Gen. A.A.K. Niazi, laid down their arms. A group of friends had gathered at my home. We listened to the news on the radio. When the news of surrender was broadcast, an unlettered cousin of mine exclaimed: 'Sheikh Abdullah will now accept premiership under Indian domination!'

For me a ruder shock was in store – the elections of 1972 to the state legislative assembly. Men from Jamaat-e-Islami also participated in this election. I noted with pain and anguish how electoral politics could lure into its trap even those who had declared moral transformation of the individual and society as their primary mission. Their intentions might have been noble, but the fact remains that it is a big fallacy to believe that any healthy moral change can be wrought through an electoral system which has sprung from the womb of materialism and in which corruption is indissolubly ingrained. This confirmed my resolve to be a dedicated academic henceforth and contribute whatever little I could to the mission of inner purification and character formation. For many years, until I joined the postgraduate Department of English of the University of Kashmir as a lecturer, I tried to work along these lines under the auspices of the Islamic Study Circle. Sheikh Abdullah finally withdrew his programme of liberation in 1975 and, as my unlettered cousin had foreseen, became the chief minister of the state, a post that he retained until his death.

Several significant events marked the second reign of Sheikh Abdullah. The most remarkable of these was perhaps his landslide victory in the assembly elections of 1977, the first fair elections ever held in post-1947 Kashmir. On the eve of these elections, Sheikh Abdullah fell seriously ill and in the forceful wave of sympathy that followed, he swept the polls. With the unprecedented majority that he now had in the assembly, he could have accomplished much, but alas, nothing happened.

In 1979, Z.A. Bhutto was hanged under Zia-ul-Haq's regime in Pakistan. For several months prior to this event, as Bhutto's trial proceeded, a volcanic situation was developing in Kashmir mainly because of persistent propaganda carried on by some Urdu newspapers in Delhi and the BBC. Although no

Kashmiri Muslim individual or organization played any role in what was happening in Pakistan, the propaganda guns were pointed at Islam-loving elements in Kashmir. As Bhutto's hanging took place, hell was let loose against Islamic elements, particularly the followers of Jamaat-e-Islami, which had had the temerity to stand in opposition to Sheikh Abdullah in a previous election. The Sheikh's administration turned a blind eye to the gruesome violence that followed. I myself approached the deputy commissioner of Anantnag, telling him that the whole of our village would be destroyed if police protection was not provided, but he refused to heed my words. As I suspected, the next day (5 April 1979) our village was burnt to ashes by unruly crowds. Sheikh sahib visited our village sometime after and declared in his speech that: *Be ousus zaenith yeth kya gachi (*I knew what was going to happen).[2]

The third great event of his reign was the crowning of his eldest son, Farooq Abdullah, as his successor. As a prelude to this, he threw out his faithful right-hand man and his one-time successor, Mirza Afzal Baigh. After Sheikh Abdullah's death in 1982, India continued to have a hand in Kashmiri politics with the help of the puppet regimes of Farooq Abdullah, his brother-in-law G.M. Shah and then Farooq Abdullah again until the crucial assembly elections of 1987. In those elections, all the political elements who stood for Kashmir's freedom and the preservation of its identity came together under the banner of the Muslim United Front (MUF). The election scene spoke loud and clear: the MUF was going to win hands down. But within one hour, when the results started coming in, MUF candidates were declared to be losing and Farooq Abdullah's party winning. This rude shock was too much for the Kashmiri psyche to swallow. Young men who had enthusiastically participated in the elections felt cheated.[3]

Those were the days when I was preparing to leave for the UK to take up my Commonwealth Academic Staff Fellowship at the University of Cambridge. On the evening of the day of the election results, my friend Professor K.L. Handoo of the Department of Chemistry and I were going to see Professor Shah Manzoor Alam, one of the few dynamic and well-meaning vice chancellors Kashmir University has had. As Professor Handoo drove us to the vice chancellor's residence, he confided to me: 'Malik sahib, I fear

something terrible is going to happen to Kashmir.' 'Why so?' I asked. 'Heavens would not have fallen if the election results had been honestly declared. It would just have meant a change of regime. If there were some intransigence, the 1953 experiment was there to follow.'

It was in the late autumn of 1988 that I understood the full meaning of Professor Handoo's vague fears. It was around this time that the first bomb blast occurred in the Anantnag bus stand, the sign of troubles of unforeseeable magnitude. The next year saw armed rebellion on an enormous scale. The Indian reaction was disproportionately fierce. Virtual hell was let loose on hapless Kashmir, which was declared to be a disturbed area. Constitutional freedoms, which Kashmiris had rarely ever tasted, were withdrawn and replaced with black laws. Indiscriminate killing, loot, rape and arson became the order of the day. Whole villages and parts of cities and towns were burnt to ashes. Those young men who were not killed outright began to disappear.[4] Military and paramilitary crackdowns were imposed on all areas from time to time. Of these atrocities, every locality has its own tale to tell.[5] How many orphans will now spend their lives deprived of parental care and affection? How many parents will die waiting for their disappeared sons? I remember an old man who had lost his eyesight and wits waiting for his son, Amin. He would roam the roads and stop people. 'Amin will come home this evening, do you know!'

My family lived inside the Kashmir University campus in official accommodation during those years of devastation. It was considered a safer place to reside. Yet, even we had a harrowing time. On one morning, as I was sitting in my room (I was head of the postgraduate Department of English then), a BSF (Border Security Force) commandant entered, accompanied by some officers. I was startled. The commandant told me that they had come to conduct searches in the department. I said, 'You are welcome and may go about your job'. They began their work in earnest. Some of them climbed up to the ceiling with their searchlights. The false ceiling gave way at one point and one of them crashed down. Having completed their search and found nothing, the commandant told me that he was very sorry to put us through the trouble. They had come, he told me, thanks to some specific information.

Another crackdown was imposed during Ramadan on a Sunday. The whole teaching community that lived on campus, along with their families (excluding women), were paraded before a line of military vehicles in which masked informers (Kashmiris) scanned each passing face to see whether any of them were in any way, overt or covert, involved in the struggle. During one such crackdown I, along with one of my colleagues from the Department of History, was taken from the crowd for questioning in two separate rooms. God knows why; perhaps our beards were the cause.

On an evening in 1994, some men came in a police vehicle to our home on campus. These were men from the STF (Special Task Force) attached to Thana Sherghari. Both the force and the Interrogation Centre with which it was associated had gained immense notoriety for their dark deeds. Their very names would send shivers down one's spine. They asked me to accompany them to their centre in their vehicle. I asked whether a colleague could accompany me. Their agreement was a pleasant surprise.

In the Centre, I was questioned for hours together and then taken home with orders to come back the next day. I went back on my own. The Task Force repeated the same exercise of the day before. In the end, the officer in charge of the interrogation stood up respectfully. A picture of politeness, he saw me off in my car saying gently, 'Sorry sir, it was a case of mistaken identity.'

The next day, several friends called on me, all angry and wondering how this could happen. Professor Iqbal Nazki was in fury and exclaimed: 'On one day you shared the dais with the governor (as chancellor of the Kashmir University) in your capacity as a member of the University Council, and the very next day you were taken to Thana Sherghari; how shameful is this!' I stated my belief that the mischief had had its origin in academic rivalry. I requested the police authorities to have the facts checked by their own agencies and not be misled by reports fabricated by vested interests.

Among my visitors that day was the late professor Balraj Puri, who said that what happened was scandalous and that he intended to go to the law on my behalf. I pointed out that the officer in charge had already apologized to me. Additionally, I reminded Professor Puri of his own write-up, in which he

had spoken of his earnest trip to Delhi to protest what had happened on 9 August 1953. He had met Nehru and made his case; Nehru's quiet reply had been that democratic rights were not applicable to Kashmir.[6]

Some years later, I had to taste the wrath of the other side of the conflict. Those were horribly unpredictable days. No one knew what would happen in the next moment. No one knew who was who. Total anarchy prevailed. Many militant groups operated in the state and there were also the dreaded government mercenaries known as 'Renegades' and 'Nabdees', who were responsible for killing countless people in cold blood. It seemed that a free-for-all had been launched against the poor Kashmiris.

It was in this scenario, in 2001, that a young boy approached me in my office at the department. Posing as a militant – quite a common thing in those days – he began to make some unreasonable demands. Without asking him anything about his identity I told him gently but firmly that I had been living the life of a pure academic for many long years and had deliberately kept myself aloof from anything that even remotely smacked of politics. He left, but kept pestering my family and me. One day, when I was lecturing in the Academic Staff College of the University, he had the temerity to knock on the door and ask me to come out, leaving the lecture unfinished. I lost my temper, raised my voice and asked him to stop pestering me. He left but a few days later, he barged into my home, along with another fierce-looking desperado. As they entered the compound, they locked the gate from inside and then started pushing, kicking and abusing me. Some neighbours came to my rescue, upon which the desperado took out a pistol and began to fire indiscriminately. An autorickshaw driver waiting on the road outside received a bullet in his abdomen in the confusion. With this began the most unpleasant phase of my life. For a time, I had to live under the protection of university guards.

The pendulum continued to swing. One day, as I returned home from my office, my guard at home told me that two military intelligence officers had come looking for me. It was 2004, just a year prior to my retirement. I was then the director of the Multimedia Research Centre in addition to my work as a professor of English. The next day, the two officers came to my office in a white Ambassador car and drove me with utmost regard to a meeting with

GOC (general officer commanding) and an informal gathering of some gentlemen. We had a candid exchange of views for an hour or so in which I was able to convey that 'an intellectual' (the epithet they were kind enough to use for me) is neither bought and sold nor programmed. The GOC was courteous enough to come down the steps to see me off in the same car. As we were driving home, my two respectful escorts discussed the vice chancellorship of the university in a vague manner. I replied with a verse of Ghalib:

> *Mujh tak kab unki bazm mai aata tha dawr-ijaam*
> *Saqi ne kuchh mila na diya ho sharab mai*
>
> (Never did the goblet ever reach me in his/her assembly:
> Maybe the wine-server has mixed something with the liquor today.)

Did they understand what I had implied? Most probably not! This is, more or less, the tale of every Kashmiri with the difference that one's status and position gives one in life. Every one of us, if not swallowed by the horrendous vortex, suffers in one way or the other. At present (2014), the level of violence may be going down and a delusive election process may be on, but the situation remains unchanged in its essentials. Killings (including of those in custody) and disappearances continue. Rape, which began with mass rapes like that of Kunan Poshpora, where the victims included an old woman of eighty years, and culminated in the gruesome rape and murder of the schoolgirl Aasiyah and her sister-in-law Neelofar at Shopian, continues to be used as a weapon of torture.[7] This situation will remain as long as the root cause of the trouble remains. And the root cause, unfortunately, is becoming more and more complex with the passage of time.

The problem of Kashmir was born in 1947 with the dawn of the freedom of the subcontinent. Kashmir lost its independence on the day that India and Pakistan won theirs. Now, the state of Jammu and Kashmir stands divided into three parts: Indian-administered Kashmir, the region known as Azad Kashmir and a small area under Chinese occupation. India and Pakistan have fought three bloody wars, the third of which left Pakistan dismembered, resulting in a legacy of bitterness and mistrust. There is an internal struggle in the state along regional, ethnic, religious and linguistic lines, each entity seeking to establish

its own identity as the dominant one. Had the state been allowed to remain independent, these tensions would have been automatically resolved in a democratic culture whose foundations had already been laid.

The miseries of Kashmiri Muslims are indescribable. The Pandits of the region are displaced and scattered in various parts of India. And the common man of India and Pakistan watches as his resources and taxes are spent on gunpowder and lethal weaponry instead of welfare and development. Kashmir is now a mind-boggling tangle, which defies all simplistic solutions. Plebiscite, which had been recommended by the UN and could have salvaged Kashmir in 1948, is now beset by insurmountable problems. The division of the state on communal lines may give rise to more problems than it would resolve and further vitiate the national and international atmosphere.

I had suggested in an international conference on Kashmir, held in Washington in 2009 and attended among others by Kashmiri Pandits and Dogras, that the way forward is quite arduous, nerve-racking and extremely trying for patience and wisdom. As a first step in this direction, all concerned parties will have to cooperate to generate a conducive atmosphere, for which three important measures will have to be taken simultaneously: (i) demilitarization and release of all political prisoners in both Kashmirs; (ii) facilitation and encouragement of a free people-to-people contact by opening the borders and through joint seminars and conferences; (iii) resettling the displaced people and migrants. In the atmosphere of goodwill and mutual understanding thus created, a general election can be held under international auspices to elect the legislative assembly for the whole state of Jammu and Kashmir, with 80 per cent to be directly elected and the remaining 20 per cent (technocrats, writers, intellectuals and so on) to be nominated by elected parties in the assembly in proportion to their strength. This assembly will be empowered to take a final decision on the political future of the state which shall be binding on all the parties concerned.

When I was making this suggestion, I knew that, given our situation, proposing such an innocuous and seemingly practical solution amounted to dreaming. But what has the poor Kashmiri been left to do except dream? I wove yet another dream about what perhaps could have been. This other

dream appeared as a Friday editorial in the most widely read English daily in Jammu and Kashmir, (for which I have been writing for the last nine years), the *Greater Kashmir* (20 August 2010). I would like to close my piece with this dream:

A DREAM

Last night I had a significant dream, and it was pleasant too. To have a pleasant dream in blood-drenched Kashmir is a wonder if not a miracle; here one can have only nightmares. But you cannot help dreaming, as dreaming is an involuntary process. That is why it is not a cognizable offence under any human or divine law. It is not a punishable offence even in Kashmir.

I dreamt myself in 1947, and saw Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Jawaharlal Nehru in very serious conversation. Jinnah proposed to Nehru that both of them agree to leave the independent state of Jammu and Kashmir as it is. 'Let us not disturb these poor, simple people. Their ruler, Hari Singh, is a native of Jammu and Kashmir and he has already taken some significant measures towards gradually ushering in the democratic order. The electoral process has begun and some elected members have already entered the assembly.' After considerable reluctance and dilly-dallying, the 'Hamlet of India' concurred.

And then a strange scenario began to unfold before my eyes – a panorama of hope and promise, sunny, glittering, blessed, heartening. Three states began to develop simultaneously in an atmosphere of goodwill, cooperation and harmony – India, Pakistan and the Republic of Jammu and Kashmir. Kashmir became the hub of international tourism. Investors – particularly from India and Pakistan – began to generously invest in the Republic. The markets were full of Indian and Pakistani goods as well as articles from other countries. As one walked through the bazaars, one could feast one's eyes on Pakistani cloth, rice, sugar and mountain salt on the one hand and Indian computers, cars, buses and machines on the other. In addition to their own channels, Kashmiris watched both Indian and Pakistani ones, although Indian films were more popular. The exchange of books and magazines and newspapers existed among all the three states. Similarly, there was free trade between all the three states

and J&K was the greatest beneficiary. Kashmiri fruit, saffron, woollen cloth, arts and crafts and many other products were big foreign exchange earners for Kashmir. Kashmiris could travel freely to either of the two neighbouring nations. Some of them studied in the universities of Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad while others chose to study in Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore and Kolkata. They had their trade centres and shops in the major cities of both countries.

War was unknown. Three bloody wars were not fought. Pakistan was not dismembered. Thousands and thousands of people were not decimated. Extremely fabulous and uncountable amounts of money – the blood of the common man, the taxpayer – were not frittered away on the production of arms and ammunition. Forgetting their poor and starving millions, India and Pakistan did not divert their resources to produce lethal nuclear weaponry. Instead, the taxpayer's money was spent for the happiness and betterment of the taxpayer.

Terrorism was not known because there was no reason for it to exist. Since the three Republics lived in harmony and none wanted to dominate and exploit the others, mistrust and suspicion did not bedevil their relationship. None of them conspired to harm the others. Kashmir was actually a paradise – not a hell dubbed paradise. No section of the Kashmiri population – regardless of religion or ethnicity – lived in fear, insecurity and disadvantage, nor were Kashmiris killed like worms or deprived of their hearths and homes. Instead of the Kashmiri diaspora, we had Kashmiris spread in all parts of the world as ambassadors of love and peace, practising medicine and engineering and pursuing trade.

The panorama was still in the process of unfolding when all of a sudden, I woke up. Opening my eyes, I asked myself: 'Can't this dream – at least the implementable part of it – be still translated into reality in a gradual process?'

Professor G.R. Malik was the head of the postgraduate Department of English, University of Kashmir for about twelve years. He is the author of *Iqbal and the English Romantics; Southey and Moore: The Oriental Connection; The Western Horizon: A Study of Iqbal's Response to the West; Iqubal and the English*

Romantics; Kashmiri Culture and Literature: Some Glimpses; and *Habba Khatoon*. Professor Malik is also the co-editor of several anthologies and textbooks and a reputed columnist.

NOTES

* This is the author's reminiscences. Notes have been added by the editors to substantiate some of the statements.

1 This case was filed by the Government of India against Sheikh Abdullah and twenty-three others for espousing the cause of independent Kashmir; framed in 1958, the case was withdrawn in 1964.

2 For more background see, Mir Shafat, 'When ascendant Jamaat faced murderous onslaught', *Kashmir Reader,* 5 April 2017, https://kashmirreader.com/2017/04/05/ascendant-jamaat-faced-murderous-onslaught/ (accessed on 24 August 2018).

3 For more background see Faheem Farrukh, 'Interrogating the Ordinary: Everyday politics and the struggle for Azadi in Kashmir', in H. Duschinski, M. Bhan, A. Zia and C. Mahmood (eds), *Resisting Occupation in Kashmir,* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018.

4 For background on enforced disappearances effected by the government forces, see Amnesty International India: 'If they are dead, tell us: "Disappearances" in Jammu and Kashmir', 1999. AI Index: ASA 20/002/1999.

5 See Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 'Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Kashmir: Developments in the Indian State of Jammu and Kashmir from June 2016 to April 2018' and 'General Human Rights Concerns in Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan', https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/IN/DevelopmentsInKashmirJune2016ToApril2018.pdf. (accessed on 24 August 2018).

6 Balraj Puri's write-up about his meeting with Prime Minister Nehru after 9 August 1953 had appeared in his magazine called *Human Rights* which he edited and published during the last days of his life.

7 For background on rape being used as a weapon of war, see Human Rights Watch, 'Rapes in Kashmir, a crime of war', 1996. Retrieved from https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/INDIA935.PDF. For report and analysis of the mass rapes in twin village of Kunan Poshpora, see Batool, E., I. Butt, M. Rashid, N. Rather, and S. Mushtaq, *Do you remember Kunan Poshpora?,* New Delhi: Zubaan Books, 2016.

2

The Life Story of Kashmir

Zareef Ahmed Zareef*

I humbly convey to my dear reader that I, one of seven siblings, am the heir to an eminent, honourable, brave and artistic business family based in the Valley of Kashmir. My primary education took place in Islamia High School, Nusratul Islam, Srinagar. Among my early teachers were Professor Rahman Rahi and Abdul Sattar Shahid. Professor Rahi taught us Persian while Sattar Sahab taught us Urdu prose. Both encouraged me in the fields of speaking and writing which helped me in my poetic and personal life. When young people today hear me recite poetry, they think such Kashmiri vocabulary, which I use in my writing, came naturally to me. But what they miss is that it took years of hard work to attain a finesse with my mother tongue which I feel every Kashmiri should strive for.

My mother's maternal home was near Jamia Masjid. My political education was generally from my father's side, and my moral and religious education was generally received from my mother's side. My mother, Mukhta Aapa, was intimately connected with the Jamia Masjid. My ancestors had run a famous factory at Zaina Kadal, which is in the heart of the historic downtown Srinagar. This factory housed some famous artists of traditional Tila Dozi (silk and gold needlework). My great grandfather, Mohammad Shah Maldaar, the owner of this establishment, had himself been a painter and skilled master of Tila Dozi. During the time of the Dogra rulers, Raj Dhar, son of Birbal Dhar, was made Hukumdhaar. He was instrumental in raising the tax on local

handicraft from rupees two lakh to sixteen lakh. He launched the Daag Shaal department whose office he headquartered at Saraaf Kadal. A shawl could only be sold if it had received the seal of the Daag office. Without the seal, the shawl was considered counterfeit. Despite working in abysmal conditions, the artisan had to pay six annas as tax.

Mohammad Shah Maaldar was one of the kaarkhandars (master craftsmen) at this time. Along with other kaarkhandars like the Chikans, Hajis, and one Abdullah Bhat, he came to the conclusion that there was not enough profit in the shawl business, thanks to these cruel policies. The taxation policy was so harsh that many weavers cut the tips of their fingers so that they would be considered disabled and allowed to do other work through which they could earn a decent sum of money. Eventually, they began to leave Kashmir under the cover of darkness along with the karigars (artisans) via the Jhelum Valley Road through Tangmarg, crossing the mountains and reaching Poonch and finally Amritsar. One of my great grandfather's apprentices, Mohammad Abdullah Khan, reached Amritsar after passing through difficult and treacherous routes. I was five or ten years old when I met him, and listened to him talk about the conditions of the route and Amritsar. He would speak of how the Kashmiris in Amritsar had created for themselves a Kashimiri environment.

At that time, Amritsar was the centre for Kashmiris from Lahore and Sialkot, just as today after the partition of India, Delhi has become the centre of trade and commercial activities. Amritsar was then a 'mandi' of 'maal'. Mohammad Shah Maaldar established his kaarkhan in Amritsar. Local people became associated with the shawl-weaving profession, and Amritsar 'taeb' (stitch) which was used to embroider the shawls came into being. Today, it is known as the Kashmiri taeb. In this manner, by migrating, many artisans and tradesmen escaped the cruelties inflicted by the Dogra ruler in Kashmir.

Sixty years ago, Kashmiris used to wear Pashmina 'toaepi' (skull cap), also known as khaetir toaepi. They were also made in Amritsar. We had contact with the members of our family who had moved to Amritsar for a long time. In fact, during Partition, many more Kashmiris moved to Amritsar, expanding

the community there. Even though the history of Kashmir is intertwined with that of Amritsar, personally I have been there only once, in April 1985.

I had written a poem 'Nazri Iqbal' paying tribute to Allama Iqbal. I had been invited to Pakistan to read the poem by the Iqbal Academy, and I read it in WAPDA auditorium Lahore, under the chairmanship of Javaid Iqbal, son of Allama Iqbal. The poem was published and became very popular.

When Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah changed the Muslim Conference to National Conference (NC) in 1939, one of my uncles, Abdul Samad Shah, opposed the move. He became an active member of the rival Muslim Conference. My uncle was arrested and put in jail. When partition of British India happened in 1947, another one of my uncles set up a shop at Soibugh, on the outskirts of Srinagar. Since most of the salt used in Kashmir came from Pakistan, stocks were low and at times disappeared altogether. My uncle would bring Pakistani salt home in his pushcart for sale. The local NC workers would come to our courtyard and taunt us and hail the Sher-i-Kashmir. The womenfolk in the home would throw pieces of Pakistani salt at them from the windows of the upper storeys, trying to shoo them away.

The reason I am telling you this, dear reader, is to paint a picture of what was happening in the early days – of the politics, of how people perceived Pakistan as close to them and never thought of India in the same way.

In our kaarkhan in Srinagar, many cultural events ranging from musical sessions to political debates were arranged. It was in these circumstances that I matured politically. I would overhear discussions on Pakistan, and people would carry newspapers from across the ceasefire line, hidden under their pherans. One of these newspapers was *Paighaam-i-Sullah* (Message of Reconciliation). It was owned and published by Ahmedis, or Lahori Mirzais. There was another called *Insaaf*, which was published in Rawalpindi by one Abdul Aziz Mir. Mir had previously been connected to the Muslim Conference, because of which he had had to migrate to Pakistan during Sheikh Abdullah's reign. Shiekh had made sure he exiled many Kashmiris who desired to join Pakistan. Mir was from Rambagh, Srinagar, and wrote a satirical column 'Namak Paash' in Prem Nath Bazaz's *Hamdard*. Another newspaper, which used to come to Kashmir, was *Kasheer*, published by Abdul Samad

Wani. He was a friend of Sonaullah of the *Aftab* newspaper. *Aftab* would be sent to Pakistan from Kashmir. This continued up to the beginning of the armed agitation in 1989.

The newspapers played a role in shaping the political consciousness of the time. Many people would assiduously read these papers. The truth is that the news and articles carried by those papers would resonate with the sentiments of the Kashmiri people. The very fact that these papers were not easily allowed into Kashmir by the government stirred interest in their content. It was a risk to be found reading them in public. On the other hand, newspapers published in Kashmir were officially sanctioned and had a clear bias towards the Indian government. Exposed to these contending views, my own understanding of Kashmir and its politics grew deeper.

In 1947, when India was partitioned, Sheikh Abdullah became the prime minister of Jammu and Kashmir. It was part of his political agenda to suppress dissent and send his political opponents into exile or prison. As he cracked down on his opponents, my uncle Abdul Samad Shah, who was part of the resistance, was jailed in the Central Jail in Srinagar. I grew up in a family, which, like many Kashmiri clans, was politically aware. Due to active protests against the government, I was also arrested in 1965 during Sadiq sahib's chief ministership, and sent to the same jail for one month. I had been part of a crowd in Lal Chowk, which was shouting slogans. Our actions had been well received by the people, who even went so far as to cheer us.

Twenty-two of us were arrested that day, and the allegation was that we were showing the path to potential subverters of the state. Some of us were taken to a prison in Jammu, while I was taken to Khoja Yarbal Central Jail, Srinagar, where I was placed in a 'sangeen koaethir' (isolated cell). These were set up during the time of the Dogra raja Pratap Singh, who ruled Kashmir from 1885 to 1925. There were fourteen of these koaethirs, but later each of them were divided into two with the result that there were twenty-eight of them now. For three days, I was kept here in utter solitude. I maintained my courage and survived. On the fourth day, I was brought to barrack number four, where I was kept with some twenty others. Here I met the well-known religious figure and trader Haji Ghulam Ahmad Naqqash or Amma Saeb

Naqqash, Haji Jallalud Din who was a notable religious, social and political personality of Chrar-i-Sharief, and freedom lover Raja Jahangir Khan. This barrack was reserved for detainees who were religious and gentle people and different from ordinary criminals. I was with them for one month. These notable people used to teach me about their faith, as well as recall the miseries and suffering inflicted on the people of Kashmir in days past.

Outside the prison, a legal cell had been set up to help with the release of the prisoners. I was brought before the judge, the late Mirza Saifud Din. I recall that the government advocate was the cruel Ali Mohammad Wattail. I asked the judge if he could tell me why I had been arrested. He raised his head and in a severe tone asked me how I did not know my own crime after having committed it. I told him that I had not committed any crime, and so remained ignorant of my charges. In response, he pointed towards the police officer who had arrested me. His name was Ghulam Mustafa Drabu, aka Mussa Draeb. He was at that time the station house officer of Khanyar police station. He informed me that I had violated Section 144. I told him that if Section 144 had been enforced, how come there were protests and processions in Srinagar, and how had the people reached Srinagar? He said that it had been enforced on the very day I was arrested. I asked what time it had been implemented. He told me it had been implemented at 5 p.m. I told him that I had been arrested at 4 p.m. The answers irritated the officer and the judge. Wattail told me that I should keep my arguments to myself, and this was not the place for them.

The police officer then told me that had I not been arrested, the peace and tranquility of my surroundings would have been at risk. I asked him whether I were such a huge danger to the government, how many bridges had I burnt, how many kidnappings had I committed and how many people had I murdered? I told the judge that the court was nominal and counterfeit.

The judge was furious and asked the police to release me. Outside, the police officers asked me who had taught me to speak like that. I told them that truth is light, and no one can obstruct it for long. I was fined two hundred rupees, back when a kilogram of meat cost two and a half rupees. Under the Defence of India Rules (DIR), we were paid three rupees in prison.

Sheikh Abdullah had been the undisputed leader of the Kashmiris in the 1930s, but when he came to power in 1947, an atmosphere began to be created where many atrocities were committed against his political opponents. Precisely because of this, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, who came to power in 1953 and who had a considerable hold on the psyche of the Kashmiri people, put in place policies that tried to reverse the antagonism created by the Sheikh. He tried to fulfil the requests people made to him. He set himself up in sharp contrast to the Sheikh. It was during his time that Islamia High School, the educational hub of Kashmiri Muslims, was burnt as part of a conspiracy. He wanted to rebuild the school to win sympathy and build his support base. At that time, I was in seventh grade.

Bakshi's idea was that by rebuilding the school, the Muslim Conference people, who were also known as the 'bakras', would be brought under his influence. Since this school was an important educational and cultural institution, he believed repairing it would bring the population close to the ruling class. Bakshi's belief was that the reconstruction of this historical institution would draw emotional support for his own political party.

Sheikh Abdullah was thrown out of power and into the jail for eleven years under the orders of Dr Karan Singh. It happened because he had fallen out of favour with New Delhi. In 1964, when Sheikh was released from prison, he was welcomed in Islamabad. I was invited by the local unit of the Plebiscite Front to Islamabad, where a stage had been set up for him. Abdul Majeed was conducting the proceedings. Ghulam Nabi Kochak, Ghulam Rasool Kochak, Ghulam Muhammad Shah, Ali Shah Store, Mirza Afzal, Sufi Mohammad Akbar were also present. I had written a poem "Raai Shumari' (plebiscite) which I read in the presence of the Sheikh.

Here is the poem in translation from Kashmiri: We are all together asking Bharat

Acknowledge our right to self-determination Witness to this Right are all world leaders The two countries of Hind and Pak became free From the UN both got a summons
You have to give Kashmiris right to self-determination Nehru raised a hue and cry there
Pakistan sent the tribals
Once the tribals are out, 'they' will be given the rulership Our right is Plebiscite
Bharat sent here the bombarding army
They chased away the tribals

Maharaja Hari Singh fled away in night
India wrapped itself around Kashmir
Sikh army first killed the National Conference people Nehru kept on lulling Sheikh
Army was spread over all parts here
The promise of the world was forgotten
So many resolutions were presented
Bharat swept them all with her cunning
How much brain was wracked by the people from across the border.

Sheikh could barely survive six years
Bakhshi was brought
With some conditions he was given the crown The Permit system was lifted
For about eleven years he was also used

Weaving a web, the cunning continued
When Kashmiri leaders apprehended
With trickery Bharat broke in like a thief
Plebiscite Front was announced
Our right is right to self-determination

Leaders again vowed (to struggle)
Bharat is forgetting promises made
Accession with India was wrong committed
Our right is right to self-determination

With Baigh sahib came out his supporter
They spread the message across the Valley
Deception was accession, has rendered us desolate Our right is right to self-determination

Baigh sahib, Sufi Akbar
Kochak, and Munshi Isaaq
Units of Plebiscite Front were declared
Our right is right to self-determination

Unfortunate that we lost what we had won
Bharat deceived us
We turned faces from our own, and got closer to strangers Our right is right to self-determination

He regretted who did accession
He stole into his own
Then who heard his woes
Our right is right to self-determination[1]

There was a line or two about Pandit Nehru in my poem, and this did not go down well with the Shiekh. I remember him telling his friends '*Deir ho*

gaiyyi, deir ho gaiyyi, nimaz ho gaiyyi!' (It is getting late; it is getting late. it is Nimaz time.) I was taken to Islamabad in a taxi and hosted by the renowned Kochak family. Ghulam Muhammad Kochak was there, wearing his famous special, beautiful dastaar (turban). He was leaning towards plebiscite for Kashmir, and supported the cause, as was the case of most Kashmiris. I stayed with the family for the night, and the next morning I was put in a taxi and taken back to Srinagar. I was also paid 600 rupees for writing and reading the poem. In 1965, I was part of the anti-India resistance during the Indo-Pak war. It seemed in each new decade Kashmir was undergoing a new political upheaval and people like me continued to resist in whatever measure, seeking self-determination and plebiscite for Kashmir.

When the 1971 war broke out and Pakistan was dismembered, there was an atmosphere of disappointment in Kashmir. Pakistan had been a Maawin (one who assists) and Mohsin (one who helps) for the Kashmiris, and this division was felt deeply and produced a mood of despondency in the state. Such was the sentiment that I wrote the poem 'Wusiyat'. It was translated into English as 'The Will', in which I described the past, present and future of Kashmiris.

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Historically, Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh was collectively referred to as Kasheer. In ancient times it was a splendid civilization, with a history and invaluable heritage stretching back five thousand years. The Kashmiri nation was known for its impressive cultural achievements. Its distinctive cultural evolution makes me wonder if Kashmir could ever be considered a part of India. In fact, during the time of Lalitaditya, Hindus who wished to come to Kashmir from other parts of India had to tie their lower garment in a manner that would distinguish them from the local population. Not only was the place known for achievements of mind but it has also produced men of valour and bravery, who conquered vast territories and brought them under their domain.

Kashmir's historic occupation can be traced from 1586, with the slavery imposed by the Mughal kings. This was followed by Afghan domination, Sikh

tyranny, Dogra authoritarianism, and now Indian control, which has made Kashmiris helpless and bereft. The condition of the artistic and intellectually rich nation has also been lamented by influential poet and spiritual doyen of many a Muslim nation, Allama Iqbal, who was proud of his Kashmiri ancestry: Today that Kashmir is weak, helpless and poor Which was once known as Little Iran among the wise A lament issues forth from the core of sky

> When the truthful person is overawed by the king and landlords telling its sad tale of hard luck the old farmer's cottage, on the mountain side, where pain and grief ever rule Alas, the nation of skilful hands and rich mind O God your long-delayed justice must come at last as vengeance ….
> Break that wicked industrious hand, O God
> Which has crushed the spirit of Kashmir's freedom[2]

The late 1980s have become milestone years for the current uprising for freedom and self-determination in Kashmir. It was in 1989 that years of resistance finally gained the patina of armed struggle. After the freedom movement started, the Indian administration laid down a network of Indian army, paramilitary, Border Security Force, local police and several secret intelligence agencies. In the guise of quelling the movement, Indian armed forces brutally martyred our innocent unarmed people – children, old men and women. Several youngsters disappeared after being taken into custody during round-ups and crackdowns, leaving their families helpless, poor and harassed. The last twenty-nine years are a witness to collective and individual killing, raping, arson and psychological, spiritual, physical torture by the Indian Army.[3]

From Siachen glacier to Tosa Maidan, the Indian Army has enacted fake encounters, killing innocents. Konun Poshpora was reduced to a heap of ashes. Innocents were murdered during the funeral procession at Gaw Kadal, Zakoora and Bijbehara. From the 1990s till now, hundreds of our children, elders and youngsters have been left paralysed and sick in the interrogation centres and Indian jails. No inquiry has been conducted into these, nor have they been given any chance at getting justice.[4]

The Indian government has been repeatedly asked to stop the oppression and injustices in the guise of laws like the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act in Kashmir, both by human rights observer groups and the United Nations.

Proud of its military might, India does not pay any heed to their appeal. Even though many have shown their willingness to mediate between India and Pakistan in solving this long-standing controversy, India continuously rejects their interventions.

Indian militaristic policies in Kashmir have been harsh and have left no stone unturned in repressing Kashmiris. My first close experience with the new phase of militarization occurred in 1991 when during one of the crackdowns, my only son, Javaid, was arrested and severely tortured at Papa 2, a notorious interrogation centre. He was given electric shocks, which were a routine punishment for detainees there. Papa 2 and Papa 1 were used to extract information from supposed suspects. In the last twenty-five years, in large or small measure, all Kashmiris have been making sacrifices to win their freedom from Indian rule. I have not written any specific poems about these incidents, but instead filtered them into a lament of collective sorrow in 'Tchaer ta Ba', or 'Sparrow's Sorrow'.

Psychological trauma is part of the Kashmiri legacy now, and fear and worry has become our lot. My legacy of pain and sorrow and watching the Kashmiri will for freedom being shoved under the carpet now oozes through my pen and has done so for almost five decades. I consider myself an eyewitness to our movement for freedom, and I record what I witness in my poetry and prose.

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Zareef Ahmad Zareef is a Kashmiri poet, writer, social activist and environmentalist. He is best known for his satirical poetry and efforts to highlight various social and political problems. Zareef retired as an assistant cultural officer in the J&K government's Department of Information. His published works include: *Khabar Togme Wanun*, 2007 (a compilation of essays reflecting eclectic issues and problems of our society), *Taaran Garee*, 2012 (a compilation of satirical poems), *Kath cha Taeti*, 2014 (a compilation of social, political and cultural essays) and *T'choenche poot*, 2017 (a compilation of poems and prose for kids).

NOTES

* Zareef Ahmed Zareef prefers to write in Kashmiri. This essay was written by him in Kashmiri and it has been rendered into English by co-editor Javaid Iqbal Bhat.

1 Translation from Kashmiri by Javaid Iqbal Bhat.

2 Translation of Dr Allama Iqbal's poem from *Armaghan-e-Hijaz* (Urdu), Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 2002.

3 For more discussion, see Human Rights Watch, 'Kashmir Under Siege', Report, Washington DC, 1991; Also see Amnesty International, 'India: Impunity in Jammu and Kashmir', http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/3c29def33.pdf (accessed on 15 August 2016). Also see Parvez, Imroz, Kartik Murukutla, Khurram Parvez and Mata Parvaiz, 'Alleged Perpetrators – Stories of Impunity in Jammu and Kashmir,' International Peoples' Tribunal on Human Rights and Justice in Indian-Administered Kashmir, 2012, http://kashmirprocess.org/reports/alleged_Perpetrators.pdf (accessed on 7 July 2016).

4 For further reading see Angana P. Chatterji, ' Kashmir: A Time for Freedom', in Sanjay Kak (ed.), *Until My Freedom Has Come: The New Intifada in Kashmir,* New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2010, p. 99. Also, Ashok Agarwaal, 'In Search of Vanished Blood: The Writ of Habeas Corpus in Jammu and Kashmir: 1990-2004', Kathmandu, Nepal: South Asia Forum for Human Rights and Amnesty International, 2011; Amnesty International, '"A Lawless Law": Detentions Under the Jammu & Kashmir Public Safety Act.' Index ASA 20/001/2011; H. Duschinski and B. Hoffman, 'Contestations Over Law, Power and Representation in Kashmir Valley,' *Interventions*, Vol. 16, No. 4, 2013, pp. 501–30.

3

Fragments from a Diary: Trials and Tribulations of a Kashmiri life

Zahir U Din

CRICKET

In 2011, when India was playing Pakistan at Mohali in Punjab to make it to the finals of the Cricket World Cup, my eight-year-old son was in tears. Pakistan was losing, and he turned to me saying 'Papa, they are not playing properly, what is wrong with them?' I had never discussed the Pakistan or Kashmir issue with him. Why did he weep? A senior Congress leader from Sopore has rightly stated that every heart in Kashmir beats for Pakistan. The love for Pakistan runs in our blood. My own childhood was not any different from those of most other Kashmiri children. In 1971, when Pakistan was dismembered, my friends and I took out a procession in our locality. We chanted Pakistan Zindabad. I saw my worried father rushing out of the house. He slapped me and dragged me inside. I was shocked. This was the same man who used to tear out the first page of my books, the one, which carried the Indian national anthem. But that day he had slapped me.

Years later, while interviewing the late Advocate Ghulam Nabi Hagroo, the reasons for my father's behaviour dawned on me. My father had been under the scanner for heading the militant wing of the Plebiscite Front. He knew what I was risking by going into that procession. In my childhood, a number

of people would come to our house to meet my father. These visitors included Fazal Haque Qureshi, Azam Inqilabi, Ghulam Rasool Zahgeer, Abdul Gani Lone, Moulana Abbas Ansari,[1] but only after I had attained sufficient maturity to understand that all these people had varying and different roles to play in the Kashmiri Tehreek (resistance movement) and all of them in their unique ways exemplify different aspects of the Kashmir issue.

So, in a way, I inherited my resistance activism from my father. In my youth, my circle comprised Shakeel Ahmad Bakshi, Ashfaq Majid Wani, Tahir Mir, Mushtaq-ul-Islam and many others. All of them played a significant role in the Tehreek, the freedom struggle in Kashmir. In 1982, Shabir Ahmad Shah, currently a well-known resistance leader, approached us, and we were greatly influenced by his personality. When he told us to disrupt the One-Day International match between India and the West Indies in 1983, we agreed. We hoped that by disrupting the international cricket match we would draw the world's attention to the Kashmir issue. During the planning something went awry and some of us were arrested while digging the pitch during lunchtime. Suddenly we came into focus and we were placed under the government scanner.

POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

Our family holds the dubious distinction of having the first ever reported Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) case, dating back to the 1965 war. My elder brother, Dr Bakhtyar Naseem, was eleven years old when India and Pakistan went to war over Kashmir for the second time. One evening, a neighbour called on my father. 'I have heard that this area will be set on fire tonight,' he informed him. My brother hid himself in his father's lap. He was terrified.

Prominent people from the locality assembled in the house. My father had a twelve-bore gun and a pistol, which he brandished to encourage the people. Others brought axes and shovels to resist the enemy. However, nothing happened in the area. Instead, a part of Batamaloo was torched a couple of days later, by the Indian Army.[2] This incident triggered symptoms of trauma in

my brother. He recovered up to the point that he also undertook technical training in the state of Bihar but has always been ailing and distressed.

Some years back, we consulted the noted psychiatrist, Dr Arshad, who has examined hundreds of PTSD cases in Kashmir, the number of which has ballooned since 1989. Tracing my brother's medical history from 1965 Dr Arshad said that '… this is the first reported PTSD case of Kashmir,' adding, 'Till now we believed that it was a recent phenomenon mostly connected to the ongoing conflict.'

Narrating the tale of the orchestrated fire, my brother said: 'After the 1965 incident, I was never comfortable. I would take my younger brother with me to the loo. I was scared in Bihar and wanted to come back but my father was strict. One day he wrote me a letter with a single sentence: "Do or die". I somehow completed my training and got married.'

He said that our father had taken him to a renowned doctor, Ali Muhammad Jan, and also Dr Allaqband, but without results. 'Finally, I met the late Dr Beg and narrated my tale to him. He prescribed some medicines but I could not overcome my fears,' he said.

'And what scares you?' Dr Arshad asked.

'What will happen if I die? If my house succumbs to a quake, what will I do? If I get a heart attack, how can I survive? I am worried all the time,' my brother replied. The session with Dr Arshad was soothing. My brother smiled when Dr Arshad said there was nothing wrong with him. However, there was a fair amount of sarcasm in that smile. His pain went back decades to that fire; he had lived through the grim political realities of Kashmir, and his ailment had only been exacerbated by time.

In 2010, I did a study on PTSD in Kashmir for Action Aid International. During the course of my research, I met around 150 patients from across Kashmir. A woman's woeful tale merits special mention here. After performing her son's last rites, she went to bed. But after a while, she came out of her house and walked slowly to a shed in her backyard. She took out a shovel and paused for a moment. She looked behind. Nobody had noticed her. She walked towards the graveyard. The village chowkidaar finally saw her and followed her silently, suspicious. He grabbed her hand, but she said, 'Leave me.

I want to see my son's face.' She intended to dig up her son's grave to have a look at his face. The watchman took her home and informed her family of her intentions. Frightened, they kept a watch on her, but still she managed to repeat the exercise three more times. Fortunately, each time she was prevented from finally reaching the graveyard. Ikhwanies (the name given to the militia raised by the government that include surrendered militants, small time criminals, and thugs who work with the army and paramilitary)[3] had killed her son in 1998 in a Ganderbal village. The killing had affected her nerves. Medicine did not help her. She has now recovered, but not fully. Talking to a team of visiting human rights defenders, she was told about World Human Rights Day. '*Ye kis chidiya ka naam hai?*' she asked.

There are thousands of such cases in Kashmir today.

STUDENT LIFE

In 1984, I was in Kashmir University doing my degree in law. In June of that year, sensing a need, a group of students, including me, converted the recreation hall into a mosque. This action was taken as untoward by the authorities and the district magistrate and the vice chancellor summoned us. We were given an alternative – a prayer hall in the campus. But we refused since students who want to pray on campus would be better served by a properly sized masjid and not just a prayer hall. The authorities raided the place one night and seized the mats, the pulpit and other things. Three of us, including me, escaped arrest. The rest were taken into custody and then detained under the draconian Public Safety Act (PSA).

My student activism continued even after I joined the legal profession in 1987. I was lucky enough to work with advocate Abdul Qadir Sailani for two years. He was noted for pleading the cases of political prisoners and was martyred for this in 1995. By the time I had established myself as a lawyer, the struggle for azadi had commenced. In 1990, I became an executive member and the spokesman of the Jammu and Kashmir High Court Bar Association. It was a time when many people had been taken into custody across the state. A team had to be sent to the various jails to compile a list of those detained. I

accompanied the first team. We visited all the jails in Jammu and came out with a list of detainees. The list helped people trace their relatives, and I had the opportunity to understand the problems faced by Kashmiris in the freedom movement. These experiences cannot be explained here; a whole, fat book is needed for it. However, a few encounters that shook me do merit a mention.

Once I was talking to the superintendent of Hira Nagar jail in Jammu. A man from Kupwara in north Kashmir walked in. He was wearing a woolen coat even though it was the month of June. During this time Jammu is very hot and the temperature goes up to 50 degrees celsius. The man looked exhausted, and wearing heavy woolens with no weather-appropriate clothes suggesting penury. The superintendent called the man's brother-in-law (the detainee) from the barracks and allowed them some talk time. While leaving, the man handed a polythene bag over to his brother-in-law. I could smell the stink emanating from the package. Before the detainee could take it, I snatched the package from him, which contained a rotting chicken, cooked for the detainee by his sister. The man, obviously poor as was apparent from his appearance, had taken one day to reach Srinagar from Kupwara, one more day on the bus to Jammu, and had finally reached Hira Nagar on the third day. During this time the chicken had spoiled but the man still handed it to his brother-in-law as he had nothing else to give. As the man left, I followed him out asking if he had any bus fare. He replied, 'No, I will work at the bus stand for a few days and earn the fare,' I gave some money to him asking him to return home as soon as possible. This man and this incident represent to me the epitome of the suffering of Kashmiris since 1947.

GAW KADAL MASSACRE

The date, 21 January 1990, is an important one in the history of Kashmir. I believe this day changed Kashmir forever and it changed me. It was the day when one of the bloodiest massacres was carried out by the government. On 20 January 1990, Jagmohan's first televised address as governor of the state stunned me. It was very provocative. He said: 'I will not take any salary. I will

just take Rs 1,000 to meet my personal expenses. I promise you a clean administration. If anybody creates a law and order problem, *meray haton say aman ka patta khisak jayega* (the card of peace I am carrying will slip away from my hands)'. I took it as a clear warning to us Kashmiris; behave, or I will teach you a lesson.[4]

In less than twenty-four hours, the threat was carried out. The father of the area commander of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front, Sheikh Abdul Hamid [also known as Hamid Sheikh], whom I had close relation with and addressed Chacha (uncle) called on me. The speech had frightened him. 'They (the government) are taking on a massive search operation. What should we do now?' I had no answers, but I told him to keep cool. 'If they have decided to do that, there is nothing we can do about it. Let them come and search our houses. We have nothing to hide.' I knew that we had the huge military might of India ruling us. By the time Chacha had stood up to leave, his face had fallen. I felt sorry for him.

That day a massive crackdown took place in Chhota Bazaar during the first-ever search operation in Kashmir. It was a gloomy day and the sun hid behind the clouds. We were all burdened because not only had men been arrested during the crackdown but women had also been molested. The treatment of the women sent shock waves across Srinagar. People came out to register their protest.

'Allah-o-Akbar Kabeeran Kabeera!' was the slogan that was chanted across Srinagar that evening. We also assembled in Magarmal Chowk and expressed solidarity with the Chhota Bazaar people. Around midnight, two army vehicles arrived. Many people ran for shelter. But the troops had arrived to rescue their officer, who lived in Magarmal Bagh. The officer and his family left for good that night. Soon after, a bearded man from Sarai Bala, who used to play cricket with me in erstwhile Hazuri Bagh, arrived. 'Ashfaq sahib [another JKLF commander] wants you to take out a procession tomorrow morning,' he told me.

I did not trust him, and something deep inside forced me to seek clarification from Ashfaq Majid Wani. I asked somebody to call him. Good God! He had not spoken to the person who had called on me, and did not

want people to take out processions in the morning. He urged us to restrain others from doing so. We tried our best but destiny had something else in store for Kashmir that day.

Processions were organized from Batamaloo, Rajbagh and elsewhere. I was with Chacha in Batamaloo, desperately trying to keep the people indoors. I found myself arguing with a stranger on the Silk Factory Road near DAV School. Chacha was nowhere to be seen. The CRPF personnel fired several rounds in the air here, and people ran for shelter. I myself reached Sarai Bala. A small group was walking towards Lal Chowk, and I joined them. Meanwhile, a huge procession appeared from the Rajbagh area. Many people joined it and we started marching towards Chhota Bazaar.

A party of police and CRPF stopped this peaceful procession. The men in khaki opened fire without any provocation. I did not know what to do. People began running for their lives, and I got swept up with the crowd. In the panic, I saw a man named Farooq Ahmed who was my brother's driver fall to bullets. A CRPF trooper with a light machine gun (LMG) was firing indiscriminately on the scared people. This had never happened before in Kashmir. Rouf, the younger brother of my brother's friend, went to him and tried to snatch his gun. Sensing danger, the trooper emptied the entire magazine in his chest. Rouf fell in a pool of his own blood. Again, though I knew him well, I did not have the courage to pick him up. All I wanted to do was run away from the scene. At last, I made it to Lal Chowk. I reached my place in the evening. I hated myself for not having helped Farooq and Rouf. But could I have helped them at all?

The morning of 22 January was very painful for me. Chacha awakened me. 'There are nearly ten bodies in the control room. Get up, we have to bury them,' he said. I was out in the graveyard in fifteen minutes. Many people were waiting for the bodies. When the truck bearing them arrived, things went out of control. A few graves had been dug. I think we buried the bodies without offering Nimaaz-e-jinaza (funeral prayers). My elder brother was taking photographs of the bodies, and I appreciated his wisdom in keeping a record. The identity of the corpses could not be ascertained. In fact, the bodies remained unidentified despite my brother's photos. On another note, a

policeman who had accompanied the bodies told us that fifty-two people had been killed on the spot, and around 250 had sustained injuries. A few bodies were buried at Sarai Bala as well. One of my friends, Muhammad Ashraf, was at the graveyard there. He too had received a minor injury at Gaw Kadal. His eighty-year-old neighbour was among the dead. 'What a lucky man he has been. He died a martyr's death after enjoying life for eighty years,' Ashraf said. I had no comments to offer.

A few days after this incident, journalist Tavleen Singh visited Kashmir. Somebody gave her my number, and we visited the site of the massacre. There was still a heap of shoes and slippers there, left behind by the protestors when they ran for safety. 'The heap of shoes is mocking Indian democracy,' I told Tavleen, who looked down as if shamed.

A lot of people from India visited Kashmir in February 1990 to take stock of the situation. All of them posed the same question: What will happen now? 'This is going to be a turning point in our history,' I would answer them. The coming months proved my thinking right. The massacre had made the movement a mass uprising. The people in Delhi also felt the heat. Tavleen came again, and we met at Broadway Hotel. She wanted to meet the leaders of the movement, but I could not help her. Finally, she wanted me to accompany her to a place, the name of which she did not disclose. 'George Fernandez, the Kashmir Affairs minister, wants to talk to the leaders. New Delhi is ready to grant the state total autonomy. Please come with me and speak to him,' she said.

Tavleen had forgotten that I was an ordinary lawyer and not qualified to represent the Kashmiri people as a whole. But her desperation told me a lot. The bloodshed at Gaw Kadal had left an impact. New Delhi was desperate to discuss the future of Kashmir with a commoner.

JOURNALISM

By January 1992, I had decided to bid farewell to the legal profession. I went back to the university to do a masters' in mass communication and journalism. By the time I had graduated, the Valley's first English daily, *Greater Kashmir*,

had been launched. I joined as a reporter and by the end of 1996 I had become the associate editor. This provided me the opportunity to meet people from all walks of life, including politicians, militants, activists, prisoners and bureaucrats.

Early on we also suffered what could be called the first casualty in our journalist fraternity. I remember seeing my colleague and friend Mushtaq Ali, who was a videographer, at my friend's residence in Magarmal Bagh. A feast had been organized in connection with his *waleema* (marriage feast on behalf of the bridegroom) on 7 September 1995. Well-known journalist Yusuf Jameel and photographer Habib Naqash were among the invitees. Mushtaq enjoyed a hearty meal, and little did we know that it would be his last. Someone entered and informed us that the foreign tourists who had been taken hostage by Al Faran had been spotted. Yusuf Jameel, Mushtaq Ali and other writers rushed to their respective offices. I urged Mushtaq to have a plate of phirni but he left in a hurry. Had he stayed back to eat, he would not have fallen prey to the parcel bomb, which was sent to Jameel's office. But then, death keeps a definite calendar.

While Yusuf and Mushtaq had been having lunch, a veiled lady had left a parcel for Jameel at his office on Residency Road. After their arrival in the office, Mushtaq had snatched the parcel and started opening it while Jameel and Habib Naqash watched with keen interest. When Mushtaq removed the wrapper, the bomb went off and he sustained critical injuries. Three days later, he succumbed to his wounds in the hospital.

IKHWANIES

In 1996, we learned that the Ikhwanies (counter-insurgency militia) had been involved in Mushtaq's murder. The Ikhwanees were a dreaded lot, consisting mostly of surrendered militants, extortionists and criminals who were used by the government as an arbitrary militia. They went on a rampage of killing and looting, and became notorious for their ruthlessness. We had a sweet old man, Noor Muhammad, in the office. He would translate the militants' notes to the press. One day, I told him to keep aside the note Kuka Parrey, the father of

counter-insurgency in Kashmir, had sent for me. I did not translate it. Instead, I made it a news item, but that did not go down well with Parrey. He called me the next afternoon. I was playing cricket on the office lawns. Fayaz Ahmad Kaloo was in the office. Parrey abused him and told him to come to his headquarters in Hajin next day. He was told to bring me along. We were worried, but after an hour, Parrey called again and 'pardoned' us. We were told to carry the press note in its totality, along with a photograph of Parrey on the front page. We had nothing to do but obey. However, that very day I vowed to myself that one day 'Counter-insurgency orphaned' would be the headline in *Greater Kashmir* when Parrey himself would be killed. A ruthless Mafioso in cahoots with the government and the army, it was evident that Parrey's end would be as violent. My promise was fulfilled when Parrey was finally killed. Soon after this incident, the Ikhwanies abducted Fayaz Ahmad Kaloo with the intention of killing him. However, he managed to escape. It was October 1996. I wrote an editorial titled 'Either disown them or give them uniform'. This was the first write-up against Ikhwanies in the state, and with this, we declared a war on them.

In 1995, a friend persuaded me to compile a document on enforced disappearances that had been carried out by the Indian Army in Kashmir. He suggested the title, 'Did they vanish in thin air?' I retained the ungrammatical title as a tribute to him. While compiling the document, I travelled across the state and found to my dismay that most of the disappeared came from very poor families. In most of the cases, the disappeared person was either the only brother of five sisters, the only source of succour to aged parents, or the only bread earner in a large family. Many of the families did not cooperate with me. Many human rights workers, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), researchers and film-makers from all parts of the globe had made their lives hell. They had often visited these hapless souls and made them narrate the painful stories again and again. There were some cases where the so-called human rights defenders and scribes had taken away the family's only photo of the disappeared person. In 2000, I came out with the revised edition of the book and a second volume appeared in 2003.

HURRIYAT

I had cultivated credible sources in the Hurriyat headquarters, Rajbagh. I often filed stories on the internal bickerings of the group, much to the discomfort of its leaders, but I have always believed that dissent is of great value. In those days, the election for the post of chairman was due. I came to know from my sources that Mirwaiz Umar Farooq would find it very difficult to get re-elected for a second term. I filed a story on it, but the leaders took this leak very seriously.

The next day, Muhammad Yaqoub Vakil, a leader of the Awami Action Committee (AAC), came to my office to confirm the source of my story. He threatened me with dire consequences if I did not tell him. I lost my cool. 'Who are you to question me? Let the executive council of the Hurriyat Conference call me,' I shouted at him. He left, but not before giving me a scornful look.

That same evening, I was told to present myself before the executive council of the Hurriyat conglomerate on a particular date. I could have ignored the 'order' but decided to go anyway. This time, I was not greeted with the usual smiles. The council members, Syed Ali Geelani, Professor Abdul Ghani Bhat, Maulana Abbas Ansari, the late Abdul Gani Lone and Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, all were angry with me. Yasin Malik was the only person who behaved normally. In fact, Malik was in the eye of the storm as well because he was suspected of leaking the 'vital' information to me.

I was told to disclose my source in the Hurriyat headquarters, but I refused. 'If you have leaks in your house, you better plug them,' I replied. The boldness I was displaying was too much for them. I could sense that some of them were on the brink of losing their nerve. Maulana Abbas Ansari and Abdul Gani Lone were close friends of my father's. They would call on him almost every week. While Lone sahib watched me keenly, Maulana Ansari offered an uncalled-for explanation. 'He called me last week to learn about a Quranic verse,' he said. I had called him a week earlier when we were preparing for a special issue of *Greater Kashmir* on Seerat-un-Nabi (life of the Prophet).

Lone sahib encouraged me by whispering in Professor Bhat's ears. The pitch of the whisper was deliberately high enough for me to hear. 'Why was he summoned here?' The whisper emboldened me. There was an adjective prefixed to this whisper that conveyed to me that I was doing well.

Mirwaiz said: 'We know the person who feeds lies to you. He is a petty employee here. We will set him right.' It was evident he knew who the person was but needed confirmation from me. Their questioning lasted two hours. While answering, I made sure to point out their shortcomings. This approach of mine only added fuel to the fire, but I had started to enjoy myself and knew this was a 'historic encounter'. I deliberately took this approach to give them my feedback.

Finally, I stood up to leave, and walked slowly towards the door. '*Zahir sahib, humay umeed hai ki aayinda aap kuchh nahi likhengay*,' ('Zahir, we hope you will refrain from writing about the Hurriyat Conference in the future'). It was Syed Ali Geelani. I turned back and said: '*Geelani sahib, main likhoonga aur bahut tez likhoonga,*' ('I will continue to write hard'). My motive was not simply to rile the freedom leaders but to make sure that my writing served as a reflection of their strategies and keep valuing constructive dissent.

JUDICIARY

In July 2000, the state home department issued a written order directing the jail superintendents not to honour court orders seeking the release of political prisoners. I was then with *Greater Kashmir* as associate editor. I filed the story and called the chief secretary, Ashok Jaitly, for his comments. 'You have called at an odd hour. Please do not bother me,' he said. The impugned order was withdrawn fifteen days later, when the Bar Association registered strong protest. However, the judiciary has not been able to safeguard the basic human and civil rights of Kashmiris.

The role of the judiciary in protecting human rights came up for discussion at a seminar organized by the High Court Bar Association, Srinagar, on World Human Rights Day some years ago. Most of the speakers discussed the technicalities of this role. However, a young lawyer said that the process of

eroding the supremacy of the judiciary began the day the Sher-i-Kashmir took over as the emergency administrator of the state in 1947. The audience listened as the lawyer compared the judiciary, pre-1947 and post-1947. 'Maharaja Hari Singh was an autocrat. All powers vested in him. But no enforced disappearance, no custodial killing, no fake encounter has been reported during his regime,' he said. Hari Singh, he said, allowed the judiciary to flourish. 'When his queen Maharani Tara Devi wrote a note to a magistrate urging him to take a lenient view in a case, the all-powerful maharaja tendered an unconditional and written apology to the magistrate,' he said. On the contrary, the lawyer said, a *halqa* president of National Conference from Budgam district wrote a note to a high court judge, urging him not to hear a second appeal in a revenue case, and Sher-i-Kashmir directed the learned judge to quit unless he did as directed. 'The learned judge resigned in protest,' the lawyer said. 'Today, a stage has come when the judges have started expressing their helplessness in open courts.'

In 2007, the then chief judicial magistrate (CJM), Budgam, expressed his inability to ensure the presence of the accused in the Jalil Andrabi murder case. 'The relatives of the deceased are justified in casting aspersions on the judiciary for its failure to administer justice,' the learned magistrate remarked. In a petition filed by the Bar Association in Jalil's case, the late Justice Rizvi made a similar remark. The lawyer pointed out that this had never happened earlier.

THE LEGEND OF SHEIKH MOHAMMAD ABDULLAH

In 2006, a friend from India made a derogatory comment that forced me to search the past for answers. I was lucky to interview around 100 people who were witnesses to the historic events of 1931 onwards. My research culminated in a book titled *Bouquet,* which became a tribute to the unsung heroes of Kashmir and was published in 2007. In this book I wanted to show that Kashmir had produced a galaxy of heroes. Her people had never accepted foreign occupations and had instead offered resistance.

During my research for *Bouquet*, I learned that in 1947 Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah faced stiff resistance to his assuming power. As a result,

he had exiled many political workers to ensure a comfortable stay in the chair. He also invoked the draconian Defence of India Rules (DIR) to crush dissent. This legislation empowered the government to detain a person for up to two years without trial. Hundreds of cases can be cited here to prove the point. One case is notable. It is said that Noor Muhammad Sofi registered protest in an inimitable style. He went to Sheikh Abdullah's house to greet him dressed as a sadhu. Sofi had begun wishing his friends and acquaintances in typical Hindu style. 'Namaskar, how are you?' he would ask with folded hands. When he was asked why he was roaming around in a sadhu's attire, Sofi would reply: 'I am doing what our leader will make us do after twenty-five years. He has sold us cheap.' Sofi managed to hold a protest rally against the accession in Lal Chowk itself. The National Conference workers watched helplessly. Nobody dared to oppose him. Needless to say, Sofi was arrested, tortured and detained. Shortly after his release, he was found dead in his hotel room. To this day, his murder remains a mystery.

LEGALITY OF THE 'ACCESSION' TO INDIA

Before commenting on the legality of the accession of Jammu and Kashmir to India, it is necessary to know about the day the maharaja ran away from Srinagar. Three books written by the most important persons of those times give conflicting reports of this day. Dr Karan Singh's autobiography (Oxford) says that the maharaja was in Srinagar on 26 October (p. 86). 'The hostility between my father and the Kashmiri leaders was greatly heightened by the fact that his move to Jammu on the night of 27 October 1947 in the wake of tribal invasion (on the insistent advice of V.P. Menon) was seized upon by the Sheikh to attack and malign him in bitter and brutal fashion.' However, he says the exodus took place late at night on 25 October (p. 58). Karan Singh later became the first Sadr-i-Riyasat of Jammu and Kashmir.

The man at the helm of affairs, Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah, also seems ignorant of the important date. In his *Aatish-e-Chinar* (pp. 416–17) he writes, 'Maharaja was very much tired on his arrival in Jammu on October 26. He went to bed and directed his staff to awaken him only when V.P. Menon comes

from New Delhi. His arrival shall convey that India has accepted my request for accession. If he does not come, shoot me with my pistol.'

However, Sheikh Abdullah also writes (p. 408), 'On October 26, the invaders destroyed the power station at Mahore and the Capital plunged into darkness. People say when Rome was burning the king was playing his flute. Similarly, Hari Singh was receiving gifts from his courtiers on the occasion of Dussehra in his palace Darbar Garh, Srinagar.'

Sheikh Abdullah repeats the mistake on p. 411. He states, 'While the invaders were looting and killing people, the Maharaja led a caravan of more than one hundred vehicles to Jammu on October 25. He was accompanied by his close relatives and Queen Tara Devi. Hari Singh also took the golden idol of his family temple along.'

The third book is *Looking Back,* written by the then prime minister of Jammu and Kashmir, Meher Chand Mahajan. On p. 151 he writes: 'Mr Menon and I suggested to him that he should leave for Jammu as soon as possible as the situation may demand his personal negotiations with India. For this purpose, it would be more convenient if he were in Jammu than in Srinagar. Eventually he was persuaded to leave Srinagar at about 2 am on the 26th morning.'

Mahajan gives the vital information on pp. 152, 153 and 154. 'The cabinet meeting in the evening affirmed the decision of the Defence Council to give military aid to the Maharaja to drive out the tribesmen. Around dinnertime, the Prime Minister [Nehru] sent a message to me that with Mr V.P. Menon I should fly to Jammu to inform the Maharaja of this decision and also to get his signature on certain supplementary documents about the accession. I frankly informed him that I was not prepared to go to Jammu till I get news from my aerodrome officer at Srinagar that the Indian forces had landed there. Panditji did not insist and said, "You can fly to Jammu next morning."'

Mahajan says (p. 154): 'In the early hours of the morning of the 27th, I could hear the noise of the planes flying over Sardar Baldev Singh's house and carrying military personnel to Srinagar. At about 9 a.m. I got a message from the aerodrome officer at Srinagar that troops had landed there and had gone into action. On receipt of this message, I flew to Jammu with Mr V.P. Menon.'

On the same page he says: 'Mr Menon and myself met his Highness. After some discussion, formal documents were signed which Menon took back to New Delhi while I stayed at Jammu.'

So Mr V.P. Menon was in Delhi on 26 October and flew to Jammu the next morning (27 October). Who signed the instrument of accession at Jammu on 26 October?

A UNI report dated 28 October 1999 gives details of a seminar, and says that Dr Karan Singh was a witness to the signing of the instrument of accession. Karan Singh did not contest the UNI news for obvious reasons and the confusion continues to this day.

Surprisingly, Karan Singh in his address did not claim to be a witness to the signing of the instrument of accession. Instead, he said, 'It was in my presence that the Maharaja ordered Brigadier Rajender Singh to stop the intruders till the Indian army arrived.'

The political activists I have interviewed believe that the maharaja only shifted his treasury to Jammu on 25 October.

LAW ON OUR SIDE: JAMMU AND KASHMIR HISTORICALLY AN INDEPENDENT STATE

In 1953, a division bench of the state high court heard an important case titled *Magher Singh vs the State of Jammu and Kashmir*.[5] The bench comprising Janki Nath Wazir CJ and Shahmiri J gave a landmark judgment which laid down that Jammu and Kashmir was an independent state from 14 August to 26 October 1947.

The appellant, Magher Singh, prayed for a declaration that the Jammu and Kashmir Big Landed Estates (Abolition) Act was ultra vires to the powers of Shri Yuvraj and therefore, in spite of the passage of this Act, the plaintiff was the lawful owner of 811 kanals of land in villages Kadyal and Kotli Arjun Singh, tehsil Ranbirsingh Pora of district Jammu. The counsel of the appellant agitated the following points to prove his claim.

a) His Highness the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir was not an absolute sovereign and therefore he could not entrust his legislation to any other person.
b) Shri Yuvraj being a delegate of His Highness was not competent to enact the law under Section 5 of the Jammu and Kashmir Constitution Act 1939.

Shahmiri J held, 'In regards to the first point that His Highness the Maharaja was not an absolute sovereign, it is urged by the learned counsel for the appellant that before the partition he was under the paramountcy of British crown and after he executed the Instrument of Accession in favour of the dominion of India on October 26, 1947 he surrendered his part of sovereignty to the dominion of India and therefore was a limited subordinated sovereign and consequently he could not delegate his legislative authority to Shree Yuvraj [sic].'

The Justice explained: 'While the Maharaja of Kashmir was under the Paramountcy of the British Crown before the partition of India from August 15, 1947 under section 7, Indian Independence Act (10 and 11 Geo VI Ch 30) passed by the British parliament the Suzerainty of His Majesty over the Indian States lapsed and all functions exercised by His Majesty at that date with respect of state of Jammu and Kashmir, all obligations of His Majesty towards Jammu and Kashmir state or the ruler thereof and all powers, rights, authority or jurisdiction exercisable by His Majesty at that date in relation to Jammu and Kashmir by treaty or otherwise lapsed and the state became an independent and sovereign state in the full sense of International law. Thus, whatever limits to the sovereignty of His Highness in relation to matters coming within the sphere of paramountcy existed before August 15, 1947, these ceased to exist and His Highness became an uncontrolled and absolute sovereign even in relation to such spheres from that [sic].'

Similar views were expressed by Wazir CJ who stated: 'It is contended on behalf of the appellant that His Highness the Maharaja Bahadur Hari Singh was not an omnipotent sovereign but was a subordinate sovereign. His sovereignty, if any, was lost after the state's accession to India … This

contention is based on a misconception of the true constitutional position of His Highness … Maharaja was the fountain of all powers, executive, legislative and judicial. He possessed all the essential attributes of absolute sovereignty and his position can well be compared to the British Parliament. A reference of section 7 of the Indian Independence Act, 1947 will further make it clear that even the external sovereignty of His Highness reverted to him after the lapse of the paramountcy of the British crown. His Highness thus became an omnipotent sovereign after the new dominions of India and Pakistan came into existence [sic].'

If accession was a treaty between India and the Dogra maharaja, India can be accused of violating its terms and conditions. The democratic state of India never respected the treaty and has not, till date, fulfilled the conditions agreed upon by the Government of India and Maharaja Hari Singh. As per the treaty, India was supposed to make a reference to the people after restoration of normal conditions in the state. Even the international community repeatedly urged the Government of India to ensure a free and fair plebiscite in Jammu and Kashmir. But India, through legislative and administrative means, tried to integrate Jammu and Kashmir to India against the will of the people. And unfortunately, it always found collaborators and puppets to strengthen its hold on Kashmir. Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah, the tallest leader of Kashmir ended his twenty-two-year political wilderness in February 1975. The Plebiscite Front that strived for twenty-two years for the right to self-determination was sacrificed in lieu of power. But, the agreement did not last long and could not bring the much-needed peace to the beleaguered people of the state. After twelve years, in 1989, Kashmiris resorted to arms to enforce their rights. The struggle continues to this date.

RETRACING OUR HISTORY

My life experiences and research has revealed that our history has been doctored to suit Indian interests. Kashmiris needed a peoples' version of their history which for me has become a lifelong project. In the meantime, my colleagues in the Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society urged me to

produce a history book in a story form for students that resulted in my writing of *Flashback*, which was published in 2013. However, this is not the end. The year 1947, the tyranny that was imposed on the Kashmiris soon after, and the events that preceded this year are very important to Kashmiris. However, we are often told to forget 1947 and move on. But how can we forget it? Our dispute has its roots in 1947. We have to go back to this history to prove that Kashmir is an independent democracy. And that is what my activism and scholarship hopes to chart.

Zahir U Din is a renowned Kashmiri journalist, lawyer and civil society activist. He has been the associate editor of the *Greater Kashmir*. His books include two-volume compilation on enforced disappearances in Kashmir, *Did They Vanish in Thin Air?;* a book on the unsung Kashmiri heroes titled, *Bouquet*; and *Flashback*, which is the narrative history of Kashmir. Currently, he is finishing a book on peoples' history of Kashmir.

NOTES

1 They are well-known Hurriyat Conference leaders.

2 Handoo, Bilal, 'Batamaloo Blaze', *Kashmir Life*, 10 August 2015, http://kashmirlife.net/batamaloo-blaze-issue-21-vol-07-2-83161/ (accessed on 6 July 2018).

3 See Bhan, M., H. Duschinski, and A. Zia, '"Rebels of the Streets": Violence, Protest, and Freedom in Kashmir', in H. Duschinski, M. Bhan, A. Zia and C. Mahmood (eds), *Resisting Occupation in Kashmir*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018.

4 For more, see Mir, Farhat, 'Governor's Rule in Jammu and Kashmir: Residents recall Jagmohan Malhotra's 1990 reign with fear, horror', Firstpost, 2018. https://www.firstpost.com/india/governors-rule-in-jammu-and-kashmir-residents-recall-jagmohan-malhotras-1990-reign-with-fear-horror-4602271.html (accessed on 7 July 2018); also see Handoo, Bilal, 'He came as a nurse, but …,' *The Free Press Kashmir*, 2018, https://freepresskashmir.com/2018/01/19/jagmohan-he-came-as-nurse-but/ (accessed on 7 July 2018).

5 See AIR 1953, J&K 25 Vol. 40, C.N.17.

4

Of Rooms and Resistance: Prisons, Protests, and Politics in Kashmir

Mona Bhan

I came of age in the 1990s, amidst curfews and crackdowns. Before the 1990s, the situation in Kashmir was by no means peaceful. Not for me, at least. In the 1950s and '60s, my maternal grandfather had spent five years in jail, fighting the tyrannical occupation of a land he loved intensely. Even though the rebellion that swept our land in the 1990s seemed 'erratic' to many, it had been long in the making. The Kashmir issue had divided India and Pakistan and made them bitter rivals. It had also divided my family.

In many ways ours was a conventional Kashmiri Pandit family. And yet my grandfather's politics set it apart from many others. My maternal grandparents lived in separate rooms. I saw them share a life, sometimes their joys and sorrows too, but the bitterness of the conflict and my grandfather's defiant role in it had taken a toll. My grandmother single-handedly raised her two children while my grandfather was in jail. Without an income and without much of a formal education, she led a difficult life, made more onerous by her husband's dogged stance on Kashmir.

When our friends or extended relations visited my grandparents, they would spend time in Badimami's (a term of endearment for my grandmother) room and only visited Papa, my grandfather, hesitantly. Even as a young child, it was clear to me that the boundaries between their rooms were no longer easy

to cross. The politics of the past forty years had hardened those lines; Badimami, a strong and dignified woman, had to constantly defend her husband's politics while ignoring the slew of insults and offences from her extended relatives. Papa stood by his principles, the only truth he knew and the one he died with.

For me, crossing those boundaries every day exposed me to two different worlds. In one, some of our bitter friends and relatives spoke grudgingly against Muslims for being hypocrites, for stealing medical or engineering seats that, in their view, belonged to us, the Pandits. Some chastised the Muslims for being ungrateful to India, despite its continued benevolence. In the other world, I read Leo Tolstoy, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Shakespeare, Charles Dickens, Jonathan Swift and Premchand. The room was packed with books: the Quran and the Gita stacked on to each other. In this room, languages and worlds blended into each others as Papa could recited couplets in Farsi, which he knew well, and Sanskrit that he had taught himself during his prison stints.

The memory of the two rooms in the upper storey of our rented accommodation in Lal Chowk and the lines that separated them continue to haunt me. The Kashmir dispute had divided our family and its turmoil was etched on the doors and corridors of the house. The curse of a tortured and enslaved land had become our curse too. We couldn't rest in peace. There was no peace.

There are other rooms and walls that speak of Kashmir's imprisoned history – in the 1950s and '60s, jails across the state, in Srinagar, Jammu, Udhampur and Reasi were filled with political prisoners. The memories persist; they circulate in the confines of Kashmiri homes, in spaces where they find room to live and breathe. There were rooms in our house where these memories had ceased to live. But in some nooks and crannies, between the tall and hefty stack of books and files. It is here that bits and pieces of Kashmir's history, the one we didn't read in school or in officially sanctioned textbooks, thrived. Little did I realize that Papa had struggled hard to build these spaces. It was not easy to keep the history of Kashmir's long political turmoil alive. After all, Kashmir's seductive image as a 'peaceful paradise' came strapped with bombs, bullets and bunkers.

After 1947 and till the mid-1980s Kashmir's peace was manufactured and greedily consumed through voyeuristic depictions of beauty and innocence in the Indian media. Kashmiri bodies were consumed too. Many Kashmiris languished in jails and the state routinely tortured people, physically and psychologically. In 1953, Papa was arrested and sent to a jail in Udhampur. After months of trying to set up a meeting with him, his wife and children were finally granted permission, seven months after he had been lifted off the streets of Suhayar, Safa Kadal, downtown Srinagar. It was December, during the peak of winter that Badimami with their seven-year-old son and nine-year-old daughter travelled to Udhampur for this meeting. They arrived late in the night in brutal cold and waited for Papa outside the prison's gate. Seeing their bedraggled state, Papa requested the warden to house them for the night and postpone the meeting to the next day. They returned to the prison for the meeting at 9.30 in the morning.

Papa writes in his prison diary that he could hardly pay attention to the struggles that his family had endured in the past six months, without any moral or financial support from their friends or relatives. On the veranda of the sub-jail where he was meeting them, his mind kept drifting towards the 'threatening patches of reddish clouds [that were] gathering in the sky.' In an impulsive moment, Papa instructed his wife and children to return to Srinagar in a mail bus that was scheduled to leave in a few hours.

For disputing Kashmir's accession to India, Papa was branded a Pakistani butta (Hindu/Pandit), a label that invited state surveillance and incarceration, in addition to ridicule from close friends and relatives. Unwilling to seek refuge in Jammu which was closer to Udhampur, or ask for favours from her embittered relatives, Badimami, along with her son and daughter, agreed to return to Srinagar the same day, despite clear signs of ominous weather. Papa would often recount how several strands of his hair turned grey that night, as he felt responsible for plunging his family into a death trap. He didn't find a moment's peace until they safely arrived in Srinagar, two days after they had left Udhampur.

During his solitary confinement in the Reasi sub-jail in 1958, Papa's prison cell was a torture chamber. For at least six months, in the rancid air of an

enclosed cell, he lived amidst an infestation of bees, snakes and scorpions. In his prison narrative, he writes that each time he was stung by a bee, it 'felt like the touch of a burning coal'. A severe bout of gastroenteritis that lasted several months turned his body frail. Before its torture trails became visible and hard to ignore after 1989, the Indian state had long exercised its brazen will over Kashmiri bodies inside the putrefied and anguished emptiness of prison cells.

Too many voices were suppressed; many people were brutally incarcerated or exiled from their homes, their resolve for demanding Kashmir's political settlement broken, or co-opted. In the 1950s and the '60s, such was the state of Indian democracy in Kashmir that people were either sentenced to solitary confinement for resisting the suppression of their rights and sentiments or, on the whims of a police officer, exiled and banished to Pakistan, without the slightest hope of ever being reunited with their families.

In one of his journal entries from the 1950s, Papa writes that 'Kashmiri freedom fighters were lifted during the darkness of the night and kicked into dark cells without knowing the grounds of their imprisonment. Orders of arrest of the National Conference (NC) opponents, mainly Muslim Conference workers and any other political bigwigs who did not see eye to eye with the NC were issued from the headquarters. The jail officers unquestioningly obeyed to put the arrested person behind the prison gates. But there were other methods of terror and fear, which the NC volunteers were allowed to resort to in order to see the silence of the grave did not suffer any vibration on account of dissent or political difference with the powers that held the sway. The local media was thoroughly gagged.'

The armed rebellion of the 1990s ushered in a new phase in Kashmir's resistance against Indian rule. I saw it enacted on the keyboard of an old and rusty typewriter, day after day. I remember Papa waking up very early in the mornings – sometimes before the crack of dawn – to write. Often he would me to read the typed version out loud. I was happiest when I could point out typos in the text or lines that he might have skipped while typing. After collating and organizing the sheets of paper, he would walk to the post office, a few miles from the house, to mail it to people he thought could weigh in on Kashmir: Indian and Pakistani ministers; national and international leaders,

diplomats, writers, activists and scholars. This was part of his everyday routine and my starkest childhood memories are of him sitting in his chair, in front of his typewriter, either reading or writing while sifting through the stacks of documents that cluttered his table. Recently, a colleague of his from the Political Conference said to me: 'Pt Vaishnavi ki *kalam bahut chalti thi*' (a remark on his prolific writing). His pen, his typewriter, faded words on yellowed paper, frayed edges of newspaper articles, loose sheets of paper with finished and unfinished sentences that filled his room form the bulk of my memory, my history.

I came of age in other rooms too; rooms that filled my life with love, laughter and friendship. Rooms in which I learnt discipline and also learnt to contest it if it was stifling. The neatly arranged rows of wooden tables and chairs in our classroom, located on the second storey of our school in Srinagar, seemed unusually empty after our three-month winter vacation in 1990. The room seemed stark despite the warm rays of the spring sun that filtered through the tall glass windows. In hushed whispers, we discussed our missing Pandit friends and classmates. Nobody seemed to know how long they would be gone. Occasionally, the hush of our whispers was interrupted by loud and sonorous slogans of *'Hum kya chahtay, azadi,'* which filled the narrow street outside our school. On normal days, the street was filled with gol-gappa, cotton candy and ice cream vendors, who, at the end of school day, were thronged by groups of young students. But now calls for freedom (azadi) overwhelmed the street. We guessed that a large group of boys from our neighbouring school had gathered outside and were waiting for us to join the protest march.

With bated breath, we waited for our next move. The teacher hadn't arrived yet. In the meantime, a senior student walked into our classroom. She instructed us to assemble downstairs, where several girls from our school had gathered to join the angry and defiant young boys, who were bravely marching the streets of Srinagar city. Our teacher walked in as we prepared to leave the room. After she had failed to convince us to stay indoors, she angrily bolted the door from the inside. A classmate of mine opened the door and walked out. Most of us followed suit.

I was drawn to participate in Kashmir's freedom rallies. There was revolution in the air of a kind that I had only read about in books. It was a heady mix of hope, excitement and anticipation for a future in which Kashmir could decide its destiny. In the school compound, hundreds of young girls chanted the slogan in sync with the boys who were still waiting outside the gate. The synchronous calls for azadi filled the space, forcing our principal to come out of her office. She ordered us to gather in the basketball field, chiding us to stay inside, safely ensconced within the sturdy walls of our school. We were asked to write an essay on azadi instead of marching for it. But the walls had lost their strength. They could no longer hold us back. Hundreds of girls, ranging from thirteen to eighteen, stared her in the face. In that moment of deep uncertainty, as we readied to march on the streets, the veil became a symbol of resistance, offering us courage but also anonymity. Like my peers, I covered my face with a long scarf, revealing only my eyes. And I got up to muster enough courage and respond: 'We will write an essay on azadi when we get it.' There was tremendous applause from my peers. An unending stream of slogans followed. In no time, we were out on the streets with our school bags positioned on our backs to protect us from the sting of military batons, in case we were fated to experience them that day.

After exiting from the narrow street, we arrived on the main street in Lal Chowk, a space heavily fortified by India's security forces. The CRPF, outfitted in riot gear, barricaded the street. Their trucks loaded with guns and armour were stationed in the middle of the road to prevent students from marching forward. With batons in their right hands and defence shields in their left, the soldiers waited for the slightest provocation to come after us. The Jammu and Kashmir police, sympathetic to our cause, tried to form a loose ring to shield us. But many of us, driven by the desire to taste freedom, found the shield too constraining. We were ready to reclaim the streets as young Kashmiri women, fearlessly expressing our aspirations for freedom. I had long resented the indignities of being subjected to the gaze of soldiers who would randomly stop public buses, force all the men and young boys to get off and walk several hundred feet. Simultaneously, a few armed men would enter the bus to search for hidden weapons. The slight winking of the eye, a sexually charged gesture

emboldened by an outright difference in power, or endless questions of what I carried in my school bag were routine.

On this day, it was Rabia, my feisty classmate, who took the first step to express her sedimented rage. She defiantly broke the ring, walked towards a military vehicle and started chanting slogans for azadi. In no time, the situation turned chaotic and we saw a bunch of soldiers charging towards us with their batons. The scattered group of girls ran for cover. A bunch of us sprinted towards the bund, a picturesque lane by the Jhelum, famous for its fancy clothing and handicrafts stores. Those days, shopkeepers would routinely keep their shutters half-open and close them immediately after students sought shelter from the military during student-led protests. We ran into a store and sat huddled in a corner behind closed shutters. After the usual antics of marching and hiding from the military in half-shuttered shops, I, along with some of my friends, went back to school, tired but not defeated. At home that night, I nervously called my friends to ask about Rabia. To my utter dismay, I heard she lay unconscious in the biggest bone and joint hospital in the city.

Those were strange times. We attended school sparingly. On most curfewed days, we played cricket in our neighbour's yard or stole apples from nearby orchards. My friends and I knew that our familiar world was collapsing. There were killings every day, shootings, encounters and crackdowns. Kashmiris had to quickly learn an entirely new vocabulary to grasp the dramatic events of the times. Strangely enough, our games too became morbid. Routinely, my friends and I played spirit of the coin, enjoining spirits and djinns to share our moments of distress; often, we called them to solicit their perspectives on the names of killers when too much uncertainty surrounded the events of the day. When unidentified gunmen killed Moulvi Farooq, the religious head of Kashmir, the mystery consumed everyone. My parents and our neighbours played the speculation game, sometimes blaming the government forces and at other times holding the armed rebels responsible for the killing. But my friends and I wasted no time. We asked the spirits of the dead, the jinn, to settle the query. We then ran excitedly to the backyard where our neighbours had gathered for their afternoon tea, to contribute our unsolicited opinion. In a war zone, where too many organizations, too many

agents were hired purposefully to create chaos, turning to spirits for clarity was our only hope.

By the early 1990s, most of my Pandit relatives, friends and neighbours had left the Valley. Our neighbourhood, like many others in Kashmir, wore a deserted look. Caged inside the Pandits' empty and abandoned homes were memories of our childhood. I spent most of this time with my remaining friends, family and the helpful jinn. Despite the mayhem that engulfed us and the sudden departure of Pandits from the Valley, I wanted to stay in Kashmir where the ongoing war had collapsed the distance between life and death, the living and the dead. As a young teenager, I had desired other places – places that made it to the national news. Kashmir never did. It never felt important. Perhaps other teenagers experience the same emotion of feeling trapped in a place that seems static, unchanging. Papa's stories of resistance seemed from a distant time and place. During those years, the numbing effects of an enforced calm were hard to see but much easier to experience. I wanted to always see the other world, one where time moved and things happened. And while I lamented the non-passing of time, it was moving faster than any of us could anticipate.

Despite the seemingly slow and laboured passage of time, Kashmir gave me an abundance of love and hope. When I didn't live with Papa and Badimami in the city, I spent time with my parents in locations across the Valley. My mom's patient in Pulwama, roughly my grandfather's age, brought me chicken and roti every Saturday. I always gobbled it up so greedily that it lit up his deeply wrinkled face. In the villages, I enjoyed the freedom to explore and learn from friends who knew the best spots for fun and play. Weather permitting, they would shed their clothes without inhibition and swim in the river, effortlessly.

In Tral, where my parents were posted for several years, I often thronged the streets with my friends Nasreen, Rosy, Kaki and Minu, looking for candy or maatam pheal. Unlike the sweets I bought at my school canteen in Srinagar, these came without a cover and in motley colours. I loved accompanying my friends to the local fair on Eid-ul-Fitr to buy cheap jewellery and trinkets. I still have a picture of the five of us dressed up in our finest clothes, taken in a

village studio. I am in a new outfit, imprinted with light blue almonds that stand out against the deep blue background of my sleeveless dress. My friends are in their newly stitched salwar-kameezes. Our outfits fail to hide differences of class and wealth, but the games we played and the reckless fun we had often trumped such distinctions.

Our differences did not vanish entirely, though. For instance, I was once invited to attend a class in the village school where students sat on the floor on dirty and tattered mats. After brief introductions, the teacher shoved me in front of the classroom. I was instructed to teach my peers the hackneyed essay on 'cows', an essay that most kids in India are forced to memorize. I was happy that my friends didn't seem too bothered to see me flaunt my English-medium education. Soon after, my friends made it clear to me that my Kashmiri sounded like pairim (a foreign language) and Minu, the youngest of the lot, was assigned the task of teaching me 'better accented' Kashmiri. Such moments of mutual embarrassment were rare. For the most part, we were too engrossed in our games, many of which, like cricket, we played with competitive zeal, attempting to mimic the high-intensity that was routinely on display during cricket matches between India and Pakistan. We also played adolescent games in which I would pretend to be Rosy's coy wife, who, in turn, played the part of a doting husband exceedingly well.

Only in the village could I play such games. The missionary school in the city had socialized us differently and such naive plays would be severely discouraged. Even though the school organized treks and camps across the Valley to instil in us a spirit of curiosity and adventure, the Victorian legacy to groom us into 'ladies' remained: when we were six or seven, the school staff regularly assembled us in the prayer hall and, one by one, our female teachers would lift our tunics to confirm whether or not we wore underpants. Not wearing one would invite punishment from teachers and days of ridicule from classmates.

In 1988, for the first time in their medical careers, my parents were posted to Srinagar. For me, it meant being confined to the city, where I could no longer bathe in running rivers or paint my hands red with the colour of raw walnuts. But not long afterwards the mood in the city changed too. The events

of the 1990s, scary, chaotic and uncertain as they seemed, were strangely also about new beginnings. It was a new revolution. A long night filled with deceit and collaboration had passed, and Kashmir awaited its new dawn. I too hoped for Kashmir's just future, a future where the thin veneer of 'Kashmiriyat' would peel away to make way for truth, trust and solidarity; where garlic and asafoetida would lend their distinct flavours to Kashmiri food without being persistently othered; where difference would be embraced and encouraged and not just tolerated.[1] Sadly, the situation on the ground looked altogether different. The empty rhetoric of Kashmiriyat was shred to pieces, only to be replaced by even more vicious narratives and counter-narratives in which Kashmiri Pandits (KPs) and Kashmiri Muslims (KMs) were now pitted against each other as the worst of enemies. By the mid-1990s, the horrific killings of Kashmiris made front-page news every day. There were raids and killings by Kashmiri rebels. But many Kashmiris were killed while crossing the LoC, and many died fighting for freedom or in violent raids and encounters by the Indian Army. Young men were shoved into prisons indefinitely and without trial, while mothers and wives awaited the news of their disappeared sons and husbands.

In the meantime, in wretched rooms and makeshift tents in Jammu and Udhampur, which now housed many Kashmiri Pandits, the sun blazed viciously. It melted people's pride and identities. For many, the indignities of survival in unfamiliar places, where they were unwelcome strangers, was too much to bear. Most died without ever returning to their homes. A future of justice and dignity became even bleaker as the politics between KPs and KMs turned venomous.

The venom was everywhere, but it was soaked up most rapidly by young boys and girls who grew up elsewhere, estranged from their homelands. The violent disconnection between a place and people was hard to suture. It affected everything – even the food we ate carried the venomous hint of politics. In Kashmir, during Shivratri, the smell of my grandmother's fish and nadru (lotus stems) used to waft through the corridors of the house days after the festivities were over. We couldn't warm the leftover fish. There were strict rules of eating it cold. In Udhampur, where my parents were posted for six

years in the 1990s, the urgencies of drawing stricter boundaries between Hindus and Muslims consumed everyone. Our Pandit kin and neighbours routinely discussed the sanctity of eating fish on a Hindu religious festival. Posters emblazoned with the words '*Garv se kaho hum Hindu hain*,' ('Proudly claim that we are Hindus') summed up the politics of the 1990s. The right-wing conservative politics in India had made inroads into Kashmir too. It was framed as a palliative to the emasculated politics of secular India.

But even before the 1990s, the state had played its part in turning people against each other. It had used surreptitious ways to induct people into its intelligence network. A year or so before the start of the armed rebellion, my mother worked in a major hospital in the city where, in addition to her medical duties, she performed a variety of administrative tasks. One day, a Kashmiri Muslim man of medium height and build walked into her office, introducing himself as someone who had worked with the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) during her posting in Pulwama as a block medical officer. She barely recognized him although the face, she claims, seemed familiar. At the time, his association with the CID did not concern her much, perhaps because the days when the CID officials actively tracked her father and the rest of the family had passed. She might have briefly wondered about the reason for his visit. But her curiosity was drowned out by the idle chatter about her glorious days in Pulwama and the challenges of working in a city hospital.

In recent months, my mother had been dealing with a number of disciplinary issues: after 6.00 p.m., outsiders would assemble inside the hospital to gamble, and patients and staff often complained about the noise and ruckus in the night. On hearing her complain, the man asked her if she could provide him this kind of information on a weekly basis and help the department rout out miscreant elements from the city. He also assured her that she would be paid two thousand rupees a month for the task. If the quality and consistency of her work exceeded their expectations, she could earn even more. My mother was puzzled. Sensing her hesitance, he assured her of his credentials. He now worked for the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), he said. He had moved up in life. Mom didn't know much about the RAW then

and had heard the name only in passing. But because the idea of being paid by an external organization made her uncomfortable, she politely rejected his offer.

I was sitting in Papa's room when she came home that day. Over tea, she casually described her meeting with the agent. Papa was staring at the tea kettle but at the mention of RAW he looked up, alarmed. 'I hope you said no to him,' he said nervously. I did not fully understand the dangers of the seemingly innocuous offer, but a brief lesson on RAW convinced me that Mom had done the right thing.

In less than a year, the situation changed dramatically. Lives were taken; lives were lost. Some were mukhbirs (informers), some were not; perhaps some were unwittingly so. Nothing seemed certain although one thing was obvious: the state had long spun a web of deceit and paranoia to ensnare Kashmiris, both Pandits and Muslims, civilians and otherwise, and use them as mukhbirs/informers against each other. Many Kashmiris were unwittingly made surrogates of the state. My mom was saved. Others weren't as fortunate.

Indeed, state paranoia had a long history in Kashmir. The state cultivated suspicion to tear communities apart. But it also feared those who refused to act as state surrogates – those who wrote. And those who dared to speak.

Recently, a historian friend emailed me two documents that she came across during her archival research in Srinagar. One was the government's letter to the assistant superintendent of police (ASP), CID, a letter written in response to Badimami's request to start a newspaper, the *Kashmir Humanist*. This request came soon after Papa's Urdu newspaper, *Jamhoor*, was banned in 1952 for its anti-NC reporting only a few months after it was launched. The government had instructed the ASP (CID) to check Mrs Vaishnavi's credentials in order to determine whether or not she was a suitable candidate to run the paper. The ASP (CID)'s letter is worth quoting at length: 'The applicant is reported to be the wife of Rughonath Vaishnavi, an advocate of Srinagar. The lady is not much qualified but knows Hindi. She has not come to our notice for any subversive activity. Her husband … has been contributing articles to the *Jamhoor* criticizing the government.'

Nothing about this letter seems dramatic; nothing is out of the ordinary. Perhaps it is the routinized nature of this exchange that I find deeply troubling, the ease with which allegations of subversion were levelled against people to silence their views and crush their non-violent dissent. People who refused to collaborate were constantly tracked and monitored. During one of Papa's prison stints, a CID lurked in the shadows of his rented accommodation on Residency Road, right across from the white house that is now enclosed in a shopping complex. Badimami nabbed him one night and asked him to leave at once, reminding him that her household had nothing to hide because whatever her husband believed was known to all. There was nothing in the house for him, only books and papers.

Papa died in Udhampur in 1996, in his daughter's medical quarter, which was located right across from the jail in which he had spent many lonely months in 1953. On our long walks, he would stare at the jail, hoping that the walls and chains that had long stifled Kashmir's history would someday crumble and fall apart.

This is yet to happen. So, the resistance for azadi continues.

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NOTES

1 Asafoetida (heeng) was exclusively used in Pandit cuisine while Muslims used garlic. Thus, the two condiments represented the mutual otherness of the two communities [editors].

5

The Calm and Early Signs of Conflict

Anuradha Bhasin Jamwal

BRIGHT flowery printed salwar-kameez on her slightly plump frame, black Bata school shoes, and plaited, oiled, jet-black hair that ended in blood-red, thick nylon ribbons, dilated pupils, slurring lips slightly frothy, twigs in hand – this image of Suraiya is one of the most defining ones from my childhood in Jammu. Children were intimidated by her presence, and some pelted stones from behind as she trudged from her three-storey red-brick house in Dalpatian locality towards the junction between Karbala Grounds and Wazarat Road. She would chase the kids, shout incomprehensible gibberish and return to collecting twigs, stopping people, or letting them pass only if they gave her a stick. Suraiya kept chasing children, shouting and collecting twigs till her grey-haired mother came to take her home. Mostly, Suraiya would return with one of her shoes lost, a ribbon undone and sometimes with a bleeding wound.

In the 1970s and '80s, Suraiya, known in the locality as Suraiya Paagal (crazy), was a living icon of Jammu in 1947. As a six-year old, she had witnessed her entire family, except for her mother, being burnt alive by Hindus and Sikhs during the post-Partition riots. After that, she had lost her mental balance. While my generation was growing up, Suraiya's story was not unique; there were many such around us, whose faces spoke of the bloodied streets of

Jammu. It was easy to stumble on these narratives in a neighbourhood that had once had a huge Muslim population, one that had thinned drastically in October–November 1947.

Though there were many of them, the stories also seemed distant because at the time I was growing up, communal amity was at its best. My childhood was yet to be shattered by the rise of the Hindu right and the insurgency of the 1990s. Of course, Jammu did suffer from the fallout of the Punjab insurgency in the mid-1980s. My first experience of being caught in the web of 'us and them' was when I heard stories whispered of how Sikhs had distributed sweets after Indira Gandhi's assassination, and how Hindus had taunted Sikhs after Operation Blue Star. The shocking memory of a Hindu friend asking a Sikh friend, 'Why did you kill Indira Gandhi?' is something I have not been able to shrug off my mind.

I was born in 1968, when the gory Partition, and Jammu and Kashmir's accession and division were two decades old. The 1965 war was over and the 1971 war was yet to come. My memories of the 1971 war are rather hazy, though I recall blackouts, a trench dug in our lawn, mention of bombings, hovering aircrafts, and a midnight visit by an uncle who was in the army, clad in his fatigues. Till Punjab militancy erupted and spilled over to Jammu, life had been simple and harmonious, without the consciousness of who we were and how we were divided into the binaries of collective identities. The year 1984 when Indira Gandhi was assassinated marked the Hindu–Sikh disaffection, which also began taking on the tones of Hindu–Muslim polarization, when the Kashmiri youth took up guns in 1989.

In the 1980s, communal violence of the scale witnessed in 1947 seemed like tales from folklore. Perhaps this was also due to my own innocence and blissful ignorance of the complex narrative of Jammu, making it seem something unrealistic that could not be replicated. Before 1984, there had been, of course, glimpses of issues pertaining to the location, history and politics of Jammu vis-à-vis the Kashmir dispute. It was in 1984 that my curiosity over the past and religious identities was invoked when I began reading and talking to the people in my life who had lived through those times. It was surprising to discover that Jammu and Kashmir had a very

different history from the rest of the subcontinent, that the Quit Kashmir movement against the Dogra rulers coincided with the Indian freedom movement, and that Jammu and Kashmir had acceded to India while a part of the state was usurped by Pakistan.

In 1947, around the time of Partition, the upper-caste Hindus owed their loyalty first to the Hindu maharaja and then to India. Most Muslims in the Jammu region were supporters of the Muslim Conference, which favoured a complete merger with Pakistan. The Sheikh Abdullah–led National Conference had never been effective in the districts of Jammu, Kathua, Udhampur and Reasi. The Muslim population, which was culturally a part of Punjab and shared its customs, dress, language and even food habits, had come under the influence of the Pakistan movement years before Partition.

The state of Jammu and Kashmir enjoyed autonomy after 1947 under Article 370 of the Constitution of India. It first had its own prime minister and Sadr-i-Riyasat (president of the state), not the Indian president's man called governor. All residents had a state subject certificate, which was like a sacred document. There was often discussion of Article 370, talks of removing it or protecting it. In the 1980s, when Farooq Abdullah revived the autonomy slogan to reclaim his voters, historians began writing articles about the Amritsar Treaty, according to which Kashmir had been bought by the Dogra rulers from the British for 75 lakh rupees. These disclosures inspired the feeling of 'differentness' of the state. In Jammu, which enjoyed great cultural affinity with Punjab and even Himachal Pradesh, the integration with India seemed pretty much final, despite these signs of uniqueness.

'Jammu' is used to denote both the Hindu-dominated province of the state and an even more predominantly Hindu city, the winter capital. This was the original home of the Dogra rulers, who brought the disparate regions together to give it shape as a kingdom, the state as it stood in 1947. I grew up in a Muslim-majority area where a vast chunk of houses was called Evacuee Property. The nomenclature was a grim reminder of the unsettled question of Kashmir. The evacuee-property homes belonged to Muslims who had fled Jammu in November 1947 and crossed the LoC to the other part of Kashmir. The other Kashmir was called Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir in Jammu.

In the evenings of my childhood, we would all sit glued to television sets to watch Pakistan Television (PTV), which screened brilliant dramas, serials and English films in comparison to Doordarshan Srinagar, which had poor reception, and programmes that were not as interesting. PTV referred to the other Kashmir as Azad Kashmir with a map that resembled ours, but without the north-eastern tip that is under Chinese control. Looking at the two maps, it was difficult to understand where the boundary of one state ended and the other began. The lands merged into one another and there were only oral references to Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir, as we knew it, or maqbooza ('occupied') Kashmir. I was sure there was a Kashmir on the other side because I knew people who had travelled there, or had relatives in Mirpur, Kotli and Bhimber. Many Hindus in Jammu also had roots in these places. My own family had a Bhimber connection. To me, it was a constant question: where was the border?*

Around my home, the evacuee properties that had belonged to Muslims who had fled were a subject of great interest to me. A fascinating two-storey red-brick structure on the main Wazarat Road had belonged to Mehboob-ul-Haq, the famous Pakistani economist. Almost every Muslim family in the neighbourhood had relatives on the other side. The visits between the families were not very frequent, because getting visas was not easy. Those who were successful invited the continuous harassment of police and the Intelligence Bureau (IB).

For me, borders became a first-hand reality in 1981, when an uncle who was in the army and headed a brigade on the Rajouri border took us to visit some villages. The Line of Control did not look like any border in my imagination. There were no demarcations, no fences, just army bunkers and watchtowers on both sides. Straddling the two sides were expanses of mountains and fields that told the tale of a land divided – a village of the same name on both sides; homes sliced in two. The border resounded with heroic stories of soldiers and officers. The regularity with which encounters happened even on my short visit made me wonder why we never got to hear of them on the news.

The border areas seemed like another land, inhabited by people who spoke a language similar to ours, but were under heavy military surveillance. The army was the unquestioned lord and caretaker of these unprivileged civilians. The officers interacted with locals and listened to their problems. We had never seen that in Jammu or in Srinagar. Apparently, there was bonhomie between people of Rajouri and the army. This impression was at odds with the bits and pieces we would hear about the Poonch revolt in 1947, the pro-Pakistan sentiment that had existed there till the 1965 war, and of people fleeing across the borders and then returning. I just absorbed these impressions, but they stayed with me; perhaps to be reflected upon and researched a decade or two later.

Not only the border regions, but also some parts of Jammu itself resembled a garrison, especially at all its exits – north, south and west. Jammu is a hub from where the army convoys move in different directions. The military presence has increased in recent decades and the cantonment areas have become almost out of bounds to the ordinary civilian. Till the 1990s, the scene was different. During my schooldays in the city's sole convent school, which was within a stone's throw of the army cantonment, our movements were never restricted. The school buses would drop us off every morning and wait for us every afternoon, parked on the road that led to Satwari, the large cantonment area. Frolicking children would board the buses or stroll on the road or concoct games without any hindrance. This same road is now totally barricaded. The bus stop has been shifted to the National Highway, which has its own perils of traffic hazards and accidents. Military presence before the 1990s was a common feature of the city, but never alarming, never sparking fears of retaliation from the army or grenade blasts. But now, things are different.

Yet, despite this strain, Jammu has great sympathy for the army. The province has a traditional culture of joining the armed forces and a major chunk of the men are from Jammu. Every second home in the area is connected to the army, directly or indirectly.

In my schooldays, on the crossing junction between the National Highway and the road that used to serve as our school bus stand, was stationed an old

war tank from Pakistan, a relic of the 1965 or 1971 war. Another, bigger tank was kept on display outside the Maulana Azad Stadium across the bridge, the vital link between the old and new city. We grew up seeing these two tanks almost daily. During my vacations to other parts of the country, I wondered why the war relics, men in uniform and 3-tonne army trucks did not seem to have a place on the roads of Delhi, Kolkata or other cities as they did in Jammu. The proximity to the war zone, the vulnerability of the city to a conflict, was unknown in those days of innocence when the atmosphere was not so badly permeated by insecurity, fear, panic and mistrust. Today, things are very different.

By and large, Jammu has been comfortable with its Indian identity and Indian-ness, but there was enough still to spark a feeling of unease. Chilling stories of bloodshed from 1947 were not the only reason. The continuum of Hindu right-wing assertion and its provocative presence further broke the calm. My father, Ved Bhasin, who had been active as student leader during the Quit Kashmir movement in 1946–47 and later in opposing communal violence in Jammu, spoke of the RSS's role in the brutal murders of 1947. He said that the maharaja's forces supported the communal elements, and there was an attempt to change the demography of Jammu and Kashmir right from those days of violence. He spoke of RSS marauders marching in the streets with naked swords and of the state prime minister, Meher Chand Mahajan, telling a delegation of Hindus of the changing demographics of the state. Pointing to the Ramnagar Rakh, where hundreds of Gujjars coming to the city to supply milk had been waylaid and slain, and some bodies of Muslims were still lying, he said 'the population ratio too can change'. Did such a history contribute to the silence of the Muslims? Such questions come to my mind now.

The proximity to the borders, the two wars with Pakistan and the heavy presence of military across Jammu province made Jammu very different from the Indian mainland. Huge tracts of barricaded land formed forbidden army zones; barbed wire and movement of convoys were part of the normal landscape though the military presence was benign, that is, unless you had the wrong religious identity. Our experiences with the army depended on which

region we were from and what religious identity we had. I was fortunate to be living in the safer confines of Jammu city. Those who lived on the borders, especially along the LoC, had a different life. The silence of Muslims in Jammu city and other Hindu areas of the province was extremely different from the way Muslim assertion shaped itself in the border districts of Rajouri and Poonch, which had borne the adverse impact of partition of the state, socially and economically.

There was, however, less interaction with people from Rajouri and Poonch, even though we had more of a cultural and linguistic affinity with them than with other parts of Kashmir. The legacy of the days of the maharajas had left the state with two capitals – Jammu and Srinagar – which was an economic burden that could not be questioned but which offered the opportunity for greater interaction. With time, the economy of the two regions had become interdependent, Jammu being the main trading hub. We would go to Srinagar during the long summer holidays and many Kashmiris came to the warmer plains of Jammu in the winter. Kashmiri families inhabited the flats we lived in and they were always welcome. It meant more friends, more hours of playing cricket and hide-and-seek. It hardly mattered that they were different. I remember the Muslim homes seemed different. Their rooms had warm corners with floral seating arrangements where you would always find a pheran-clad elderly person with a kangri. These winter visitors to Jammu were both Muslim and Hindu families and the two were difficult to tell apart.

Most of our time was spent in playing cricket. Our matches started with the creation of teams, which we called India and Pakistan. To my surprise, some Kashmiri Muslims were happier being part of the Pakistani team. They spoke a lot about Pakistan and their heroes were Pakistani cricketers: Imran Khan, Zaheer Abbas, Javed Miandad, and not Sunil Gavaskar and Vengsarkar. There were also some children from Jammu who would call Pakistan an enemy whenever some Muslim Kashmiri kid became euphoric about Pakistan's victory in a match. Such discussions caused some discomfort, though only momentarily; they also raised queries that did not seem so significant and overwhelming in those days. Kashmir was different, not only for the enormous beauty of its verdant hills, meadows and lakes, but because the people were

different in their appearances and attitudes. Many shops had posters of Pakistani cricketers pasted on their walls, and some Islamic calligraphy, quite different from some of the shops in Jammu where incense burned all day long, blurring the image of some Hindu god or goddess.

My Kashmiri friends were often far more liberated and progressive than my friends from Jammu. They did not look down condescendingly, as some Jammu children did, on groups of boys and girls playing together. They read more books and had travelled more. They were affectionate, friendly, spoke about books, characters, ideas, relationships and the world; sometimes they seemed years ahead of the other native Jammu children I knew.

In the winter of 1986, while still in school, a nearby locality witnessed a minor Hindu–Muslim clash and Jammu was put under curfew for a few days. We met our Kashmiri (Muslim) friends in the playground as usual and played our games; even laughed at the absurdity of religion-based riots and promised each other that such trivial things would never get in the way of our friendship. Little did we realize that politics was creating a different future for all of us. The Babri Masjid demolition in India and resurgence of militancy in Kashmir were likely to chart out a course where threads of conflict and communalism would be intertwined, and the multi-ethnic Jammu community would be the most severely hit.

The 1965 war had brought us stories of villages being torched in Rajouri and Poonch, of pro-Pakistan posters showing up in villages and towns in Thanamandi in Rajouri district, of people being persecuted and fleeing across the borders in thousands. In 1974, Sheikh Abdullah signed an accord with Indira Gandhi, and became chief minister of the state. At the age of six, it was difficult to pay attention to an accord, but I do have a memory of hearing about Sheikh Abdullah's release and wondering why leaders were being arrested even after Independence.

The early 1980s, 1984 to be exact, brought the chilling account of Maqbool Bhat's hanging in Tihar jail, and Kashmir erupted in protest. Even so, this did not surprise me. Kashmiris were known to be emotional people. They would often protest even something that happened in, say, Palestine or Iran. When a new political phenomenon in Kashmir took shape in the form of

the Muslim United Front (MUF) in the run-up to the 1987 elections, some linked it to a perceived alienation from the people from India, and Maqbool Bhat's hanging. As has been a historical malaise in Kashmir, the elections were rigged and protests erupted. But sitting in Jammu, where none of these events cast their immediate shadow, for me it was difficult to think of them as the precursor to an impending crisis.

When whispers began of Kashmiri youth crossing the border and returning as militants, they were dismissed as jokes. The traditionally militaristic Dogras stereotyped Kashmiris as 'cowards'. But when the first signs of militancy became visible, it was momentous. I felt the need to reread the history of Kashmir, in a more authentic light, a sentiment, which is also a part of my own writing.

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NOTES

* The line dividing the two Kashmirs is not a border but is recognized as Line of Control, originally called ceasefire line. Editors.

6

In Memory Lake

Mirza Waheed

THE BIG FISH

FISHING was forbidden. Only rough kids did it, or those who were in want, or tourists in pursuit of freshwater trout that wasn't really freshwater trout, and in any case, it was probably illegal to fish in the lake nearby. The 'probably' was key, because it allowed the elders sufficient ambiguity behind which to hide their unjust disapproval and invoked just enough fear of the mythical guard from the fisheries department to make the children think hard, or at least exercise extreme caution in choosing their spot.

But I caught a large fish once. It was startling to see a fluttering, shining, probably cursing, creature appear from the willow-covered channel by the houseboat in the Nigeen Lake near our ancestral house in Srinagar. We had been angling for some time, with prayers on lips and dough balls the size of rat droppings for bait, mostly hooking in baby fish not much bigger than adolescent tadpoles but also medium-sized, edible fish every half an hour or so. We deposited the catch in a water-filled polythene bag, occasionally distracted but also reassured, perhaps even pleased, by the writhing little creatures. Back then, that this might be cruel, or just ordinary, didn't enter the discussion, because there wasn't a discussion.

I was probably twelve or thirteen, I don't remember. It remains unclear why this activity was expressly proscribed not just by my parents but by the

entire elder corps at home. We simply weren't allowed to go fishing like some of the neighbours did, but, clearly, there was more to the 'ban'. People who lived around the lake had for centuries depended on it for their livelihood, growing vegetables and flowers on near-magical floating gardens, and harvesting the lake for lotus stems or weeds with which to weave straw carpets, and, most importantly, for fish that they then sold by the ghat of the marble shrine at Hazratbal on the western shore of the larger Dal Lake. And yet, I had heard it was a crime to fish in the adjacent little jewel of Nigeen Lake favoured by foreign tourists, their backs shining swatches of flesh on the sun decks of the houseboats. They too were like fish. Carp perhaps. (As a matter of historical fact, carp were artificially introduced in the lake in the 1950s.) I suspect this was a highly successful rumour disseminated by the houseboat owners. How could they have pesky little locals disturb the siesta of Western tourists?

My partner in crime was a boy named B, the Tailor Master's son. Being younger, B was both a friend and sidekick. When the little beast shot out of the water, it didn't feel like a threat at first, its enormous weight still not subject to gravity. When the line had suddenly tightened we just yanked at it in surprise. I also cried out B's name aloud. Now it landed on the mouldy muddy grass – there may have been a rose bush by the side too – and began to dance with a vehemence I'd not thought fish capable of. Instinctively, we brought down the improvised fishing rod on her – what kind of early gender politics in men makes you think all fish are her, she? – and pressed all our weight on it, B clasping hard at the other end. When we felt it may still escape, overthrowing us, we beat it with the willow rod. Eventually, it calmed down, passed out or died, and we put it in the bag, which smelled of fish breath, I thought, and then put another bag on top because its tail, protruding out, must have felt like evidence of murder.

This was the catch of my life, a prize worthy of a parade home. But I couldn't give it to my mother with the wilfully understated man-triumph that all hunter-gatherers must feel. For a moment I thought it was perhaps time to confess to the dark art of secret fishing and list all my achievements in the field.

In the end I settled for the fifteen minutes of glory of walking home with the bulging bag in one hand and fishing rod in the other. B carried the other bag containing the also-catches. In the little market square, I walked slowly and said prolonged salaams to the few people who always sat by the shops. These were the boys and men with whom I wasn't allowed to socialize. These were the boys and men who chose not to come to our aid when my grandmother died.

By the time we were closer home I had made my decision. As B began to curve towards the by-lane that went to his house, I handed him my big bag and said with some paternalistic pride, 'B, give it your father and mother'. He looked up at me, then at the bags in his hands, and left. I don't know why I didn't just say mother. The proverbially phlegmatic Tailor Master was the most visible face in the neighbourhood, seated as he was every day behind the large glass panel in his boss's seat at the business he ran in front of his house. Before him, it had been his father, who, I remembered, didn't do any tailoring but sat all day in the shop, looking at passers-by, holding forth on any topic – a legendary tobacconist who knew the recipe for perfectly consistent wet tobacco, how communism was the only way towards a casteless society … – and sometimes cursing between minor coughing fits, as he dragged on the shop hookah. When the old man died, I sneaked through unknown legs and watched his body on a wooden plank when the men atop those legs gave him his last bath. He looked like a large shrivelled white bird.

The next day or the day after, Tailor Master waved at me as I passed his workshop. I had made sure he saw me. 'That was some good booty, Junior Mirza, why don't you fish more often, and also teach B how to catch the big items … The little ones don't make for good dinner,' he said as I sat down. Kashmiris are inveterate carnivores, but for many families with limited incomes it is often only a once-a-week luxury. To have a midweek bonanza – even if it was only fish and not the usual lamb or mutton – compelled the tailor, a man at least five times my age, to express gratitude, albeit in his own way. I was proud of myself and resolved to catch even bigger fish when I was older, stronger.

FLASH BOY

In the absence of too many modern entertainment avenues, the lake was almost always our best bet. You sat by it to watch the sun dip and turn the world vermillion. You played cricket, fished and swam. You indulged in crushing bouts of self-pity over unrequited love, unaware that teenage love isn't love unless it's unrequited at least a couple of times.

There were also the occasional races. The Holy Grail was, of course, crossing the lake. I crossed to the other side the first and the only time when I was in the eighth grade, but I had to beg two boatmen to take me back, as my arms began to wilt because of acute fatigue. I had been trying to hide this from my friends.

By the Bahrar shore where I grew up was our perfect patch: a sloping tail of land – and it was literally called that, the tail – that glided into the water, but not before leaving behind a cluster of quince trees that shone in spring. Moored on stretches of water between these tongues of land were small and large, low and high-end, houseboats, favoured by Japanese tourists. I could never see what went on inside, covered as they were by heavy curtains or dark wire-mesh windows. It wasn't until my thirties when I actually lived in one when, perhaps to compensate for a long deprivation, friends arranged for my wife and me to spend a day in a houseboat where George Harrison, Ravi Shankar and Yehudi Menuhin had once stayed. I signed the guest book too.

On the slope that went down to the shore, there were old walnut trees, and if I remember clearly, an orchard of corn with a vegetable patch in the middle, fenced by poplars that had cucumber and bottle gourd vines creeping up to the pinnacles. It was all too glorious, given this was still the city environs, and you could see the striking, all-white hotel Dar es Salaam on the other side of the lake from here. I wondered why the hotelier had chosen the Tanzanian city to name what I later learnt was the only boutique hotel in the land. Of course, I also learnt that Dar es Salaam simply means Residence of Peace. Back in the day, the hotel represented unattainable luxury, or something you might see in a Mumbai-made romance, a place where VIPs or tourists or film stars went and

sipped mysterious drinks. A few years earlier, when we used to take a boat to visit my aunt who lived literally in the middle of the lake – in the interiors of the muddy peninsula of Nandpora – we would pass within a few feet of the hotel and marvel at its manicured garden, which was accessible from the water through a gate fashioned out of arched hedges. Once, I also saw Dar es Salaam in the snow. It looked ghostly, haunted, with only its rims and chimneys visible. Now, the hotel is star-rated on TripAdvisor.

Memory can be a wholly unreliable but fascinating muse. Years later, the strolls and the swims and the sun-soaks came back in flashes at the most unlikely of places. I was at the Vallombrosa Abbey in Tuscany, where Milton saw enough, or conjured up without ever setting foot, to write 'His Legions, angel forms, who lay entranced/ Thick as autumnal leaves that strow the brooks /In Vallombrosa …', and I began to think of felled almond trees and the leaf-like fish that used to swarm by the shore of my lake. We had driven up to the eleventh-century abbey from The Writers' Foundation at Santa Maddalena where I was working on my second novel. It was probably because of the surreal light that filtered through the firs, or the fish ponds nearby, so high up in the Apennines, I thought of the hazy image of hotel Dar es Salaam, which doesn't resemble the abbey but is certainly stately and white or off-white like it. I cannot commit.

Among the many boyhood frivolities by the water, what seems to have acquired a significant place in my narrative memory is how one of my closest friends chose to respond to that old waterside trick – stolen clothes – often seen in films or mythologicals where a playful god is allowed to steal anyone's clothes. As we had finished another late-afternoon swim and perhaps a few rounds of frisbee, K found his clothes had been taken. There were words, giggles and sworn statements. After the initial mirth and protestations, it was clear this was a crisis. How would K, a fully-grown teenager with Tom Sellick's chest hair, go home? (That was the whole point of the prank, wasn't it, but you have to remember we are not at a promenade on the French Riviera but in a traditional, somewhat conservative mohalla where the only people allowed to walk in underpants are toddlers or foreign tourists.) Soon, however, K smiled,

lounged on the grassy slope for a short while, his shuteyes inflicting some torment on the perpetrators. What might he do? Was he very angry?

In the end it was K who led the party back home, a near-naked tall man with just his wet briefs to save him (or the spectators?) from complete ignominy, strutting in front as we cowered behind. At the little market square, I didn't look up at all, as there were a few boos or there was bemused silence. Someone called him a tourist, deploying that colonial stereotype 'brown sahib'. A couple of old men hurled taunts, 'And these city folks call themselves civilized, huh! Oi, angrez, don't you have sisters and mothers at home?' [I thought about this last comment later and didn't quite grasp what K's decision to showcase his hirsute body in public had to do with his sisters and mothers.]

But he had decided to walk near-naked through the bazaar, so he held his head high and perhaps hummed a tune too. Later, he said he didn't know who it was, and that I was one of the suspects too, but whoever it was he simply didn't want to give them any satisfaction. It is not known how K entered home in that state. Did he scrape through a gap in the back gate and wait behind the hedges for it to get dark? Or did he extend his stay in that slightly unsettling spunk state, enter through the main door and walk straight up to his room, casually answering his mother, 'Oh, someone stole my clothes at the lake,' or better still, 'I gave them to a very poor boy I met today'…? One of these days, I will ask him.

THE VEGETABLE HUNT

In 2014, when as Israel was firebombing Gaza with thousands of tonnes of explosives, killing scores of children and babies every day, I became possessed by the idea of how the people of Gaza must survive in what's clearly the worst siege of a people since Sarajevo. How must Gazans cope with life under a punitive blockade that essentially outlaws breathing freely? I tried to write about it but in the end I chose to talk about the dead children of Gaza instead, how Israel treats all Palestinian children as potential terrorists, thereby arriving at a moral–legal framework within which to rationalize the murder of children. I had once lived through a somewhat similar siege, albeit, gratefully, with no

air-force bombers on the prowl in the skies waiting to incinerate children playing on the beach or on a rooftop. When we were teens, the Indian armed forces killed the young in street battles or in plain massacres.

During one the worst sieges of the 1990s (the euphemism 'crackdown', used by the Indian state and its apparatchiks in sections of the media, and adopted by the victims too, has over the years felt inadequate to describe the long curfews designed to lock, suffocate and punish an entire people), we began to run out of food. We were fast using up the stored pulses and dried vegetables that all Kashmiri households have festooned up in the balconies or the attic, and the few gourds and greens that grew in the uncle's vegetable garden next door. It was time to hunt. Or was it because a festival day approached and we had to cook something special on the day? In either case, where else could we boys go but into the folds of the faithful old lover?

One of the older boys from the immediate neighbourhood had declared he will procure the boat, and he did. As soon as we reached the shore – another tail of land that went down steeply into the water was thought to be the safest route – Akhtar pointed to a pond-moss-covered channel by a garden that already seemed exhausted of produce. The boat was narrow. Soon we were rowing away with the help of one oar and probably a cricket bat or a plank of wood. What I do clearly remember was all of us helped row so that we could cover ground quickly. From inland waterway to another, from the floating vegetable gardens to the grocery shops on stilts in the interiors of the lake, we searched for food. Aubergines, potatoes, tomatoes, lotus stems … anything that could be had with the Kashmiri staple of rice, was a prize. A part of the consciousness tells me I must have been somewhat emaciated in those days because everyone had been eating rationed amounts of food, even as we ate all meals. Another part says I was perfectly fine, reedy as ever. Some families whose livelihood depended on daily wages from the father's shop, stall or mobile kiosk, had been struggling. Donations of rice and cooking oil and pulses had been collected, it was said, and distributed among those on the brink of starvation.

What had made everyday life worse was the long strike by government employees because it meant no salaries were forthcoming. As a result, there was

much less cash floating around. This meant even if some shops were open in the labyrinths of the old city or if some shopkeepers sold groceries from home or from under the shutter, or when there was a relaxation in the curfew, many didn't have the means to buy essentials. Of course, people helped each other; grocers who could afford to offer credit did so. But even so, a city in complete shutdown and under curfew for weeks, surrounded and surveilled by thousands of soldiers, is a city in starvation. Even if mother somehow managed to scrape together regular lunch and dinner every day, it was hard to breathe. This is no way to live, you heard yourself saying at night. One of the many ways a repressive state aims to suppress and control people is to first make them powerless, then show, dramatize, their powerlessness by subjecting them to daily indignities.

Each of us returned with something from the lake. A bunch of lotus stems. A kilo of wilted spinach. Not fully ripe tomatoes. Radish. I remember entering through the doors with a sense of victory. Scouring the lake for food in a little boat had made us all heroes in our mind. I had even stood up occasionally, in case I spotted a full and laden floating garden, with a pumpkin shining through the foliage and dirt, or if a lakeside farmer decided to be kind. It may sometimes seem as romantic as it was then, but the fact is our youthful adventure into the entrails of the lake was but a flimsy camouflage for an otherwise dire situation. We knew.

A few years ago, I read *The Cellist of Sarajevo* and I simply couldn't read it as a thriller.[1] The book has virtues – great pace, a sense of place and some riveting set pieces that portray a besieged city – but you wouldn't exactly call it a great literary text. And yet, I read it as a document, a monograph, with disquieting parallels to my own youth, growing up as I did during the most brutal phase of Kashmir's war against India. Even before the armed rebellion that sprouted in 1989, there had been reminders of the historical ruptures in the body politic. You would ask an elder about a movement, a toppled government or a curfew (that bane of our childhood, youth and old age) and you'd get an overwhelming primer on history. Thirty years later, you're at a literary festival and you are once again asked that tedious and simplistic

question about the role of politics in fiction, your mind goes back to the primer.

When I was nine or ten, I was ordered by a soldier to climb down from the chinar tree in our garden. The soldiers were, well, staging a flag march in a truck. I often used to sit on the branches of the little, forever pruned, maple. I remember getting down quietly but the idea that I was ordered to get off our tree, my tree, in my own home, stayed in my head for years. The colonized space makes the mind instinctively, almost pathologically, naysay any kind of prescription, let alone oppression.

In his magnificent personal history of Istanbul, Orhan Pamuk talks about the four Istanbuli writers (memoirist Sinasi Hisar, poet Yehya Kemal, novelist Ahmet Tapinar and historian Resat Kocu) in whose works he found the essential mnemonic architecture of the city, and of his own relationship with the city and its past. Pamuk talks about how these writers – influenced by French art and literature, by modernists such as Mallarme and Proust – were trying to forge an authentic voice, which was possible '… only if they looked to their city's past and wrote of the melancholy it inspired. When they recalled the splendor of old Istanbul, when their eyes lit on a dead beauty lying on the wayside, when they wrote about the ruins that surrounded them, they gave the past a poetic grandeur.' He suggests these writers, and by implication perhaps him too, weren't just looking at the past for the purposes of re-enactment à la the 'time and memory games suited to the Bergsonian fashions of the era [that] could evoke the fleeting illusion that, as an aesthetic pleasure at least, the past was still alive …' but to create something anew from the ruins of the empire. For Pamuk, his 'four melancholic writers conjured old Istanbul out of its ruins' and they present this illusion as a 'game that merges pain and death with beauty. But their starting point is that beauties of the past are lost for ever.'[2]

In my imagining of the two cities I visit when I go to Srinagar as a somewhat homeless émigré, I look for ways to construct a narrative that includes both, the city of my past – idyllic, befitting such encomiums as Jewel in the Crown and that larger regal honorific, Paradise on Earth – and the one I visit now – colonized, brutalized, decaying and self-destructive too. For me, perhaps the only way to achieve this is via remembrance, both a historical one

and one that is often assaulted by the everyday, the present. Do you keep the everyday offhand, not let it impinge on the more substantial, 'larger' project that in the purist's mind may belong to art, or do you also choose to heed the interventionist sentiment probably best echoed by Doris Lessing: If I didn't write about it people will think it never happened? Or was it someone else?

The bits of food we retrieved from the flanks of the lake perhaps made full my connection with the city where I was born and made. The lake had always been a special place, of sport, beauty, glamour and carefree adolescent languor. Now it was something more; I may have felt a certain rootedness, a connection that stretched from the depths of the lake to the family hearth. But the scraps of food also revealed a moment of great rupture, the beginning of the tragedy that postmodern conflict engenders. A reasonably well-to-do family had almost been reduced to foodlessness – what might have happened to those who couldn't afford to stockpile rice and pulses and oil and dried vegetables, I wondered? I wouldn't find the answer until nearly two decades later when I learnt that my uncle, Mirza Fida Hussain, helps run a charity that quietly provides for the needy: donations of food, clothes and fees for the bright daughter or son who might improve the family's fortunes. There are more than a few such small and large charities in places like Kashmir. Perhaps the idea was born in that autumn or during yet another back-breaking 'crackdown': that when everything is shut, movement criminalized, food and medicine treated as though they are contraband, and access to the larger city or the countryside from where a lot of the food supplies came, blocked by jackboot, there must be some local resource to help the very needy, a pragmatist might have said.

WE WERE ALL HUDDLED IN THE DARK HALLWAY

We would do this if earthquake tremors woke us at night; from here the elders would quickly decide whether to stay put or run out to the garden. We would do this if we heard gunshots or explosions outside, sometimes far, sometimes near, sometimes the ping of a misfired bullet that pierced a neighbour's tin roof ringing all the way down. The hallway was spacious, its floor a faux lapis pattern of deep green and crimson painted into the polished cement.

Grandfather's red-brick-and-wood house was fronted by evergreen hedges whose spines bent and broke every few years under the weight of snow quilts breaking free from the roof. The nightly thuds were necessary music. I used to imagine the hedges as a defence against invaders, a line between us and the hostile world outside, which until now mostly meant a local bully or boys I had fought with on the cricket field or on occasion the guard who had nearly caught us stealing apples from a neighbour's orchard.

The hallway, behind the evergreen-covered porch and buttressed by rooms on either side, was therefore a perfect cocoon. If it was earthquake resistant at all, I couldn't be sure. On this particular night, not everyone woke from the sound of gunfire, quotidian as it had become since the beginning of the rebellion. I think my father and both my uncles woke up, my sisters and my cousin too, and of course my ever-vigilant, ever-anxious mother. Soon it was decided that this wasn't an incident in the neighbourhood, therefore not a portent for a cordon-and-search operation in the area the next day. We were wrong.

Early morning the next day, we heard that familiar sinister announcement from the loudspeaker in the mosque asking all men to gather in an open space, in our case a ground by the hospital for leprosy patients on the shore of the Nigeen Lake. You clung to the duvet, but the voice hung in the room, in the world.

The Bahrar Leprosy Colony and Hospital, built by British missionaries in 1891 with aid from the then maharaja of independent Kashmir, had always appeared to me a mystery-filled patch. The colonial architecture of the main building, the barracks-style wards, the tall pines and poplars that no one seemed to have ever disturbed, the clay walls and the rose and ivy that hung on them here and there, all created a peculiar melancholic ambience.

I had once been told off, perhaps even given a gentle slap or two, for sharing my meals with a leprosy survivor – same plate, how could you! – who now worked as a labourer and was helping with some construction or gardening work in the house. Previously, I had also been told off for sharing my meals with Rakhu, our huge Alsatian – same plate, how could you! – who was later killed by poison, it was suspected, by neighbours who didn't approve

of the dog's barking. Prejudice exists in so many forms that you sometimes forget its proper name. The supreme sense of privilege that allows you to stigmatize a people, who have suffered a crippling disease, must rank among the worst. It was perfectly alright to have a 'leper' break his sweat over your gladioli row but he had to eat from a quarantined plate and drink from a scratched aluminium tumbler.

We arrived at the compound, or rather, hounded by the voice on the loudspeaker, converged on it with scores of other boys and men, and formed an orderly queue to be seated in what was to be our open-air prison for the day. Or two. When I say seated I mean on your haunches or with your legs crossed on the rough ground. In those days, there were still big almond trees in the ground that gradually falls into a shallow gorge through which a stream from the lake flows out. Cutting through adjoining areas it eventually disappears into another dying lake, Anchar, on the other side of the city.

During the peak of the uprising in the early 1990s, the Indian army and paramilitaries would conduct 'operations' almost every day. Every neighbourhood saw at least one. In many neighbourhoods the soldiers were very frequent visitors. In others, they were permanent residents, occupying schools, post offices, cinemas … (One day, I intend to write about my own little cinema paradiso, Firdous Cinema, where I watched my first big-screen film after bunking school and which was soon, and continues to be, occupied by Indian paramilitaries.) We would compare notes, compete even: whose crackdown was longer, harsher …? Have you seen a mortar gun? They used a multi-barrel rocket launcher to demolish our neighbour's house. Did you know the militants have stingers now?

After you had been summoned to a field, a school, the roadside, or a hospital compound in our case, a masked informer sat in a military vehicle and we had to parade in front of it, so that he could 'ID' you. If there's anything that approximates how sheep led to the butcher's pen must feel it was that thirty-second walk towards the military vehicle. All it took was a nod from Informant Zorro and you were whisked away. A lot of the young disappeared like that – on some occasions, innocent men. And many of those who came back were impaired, some for life. Torture, that old tool of war, has been so

ubiquitous in the place I call home that documents accessed by investigative journalist Cathy Scott-Clark for the *Guardian* suggest that one in every six Kashmiris has suffered some form of it.[3]

I was sixteen at the time of what I sometimes remember as the almond crackdown (I remember signalling my vain defiance by leaning against an almond trunk and reading a book I had carried with me.) As we were walking in file, my eyes suddenly fell on some bodies lying on the ground, like discarded logs of wood. One of them was still alive and I think he asked for water. It is possible I may have added, imagined this last bit, over the years but equally, his lips may have uttered the words. But I could not stop. How do we arrive at a situation when we see corpses a few feet away but we cannot do anything about it? In that banalized act, I witnessed how a military power devises a system of identification, detention and punishment so elaborate, so methodical, that you begin to accept it as inevitable, as normative. These things must happen, a part of the process.

I sat there, trying to make sense of the image of wounded, dying or dead men a short distance from me. Did they wet the grass? Behind us lay a tiny valley [with the stream in the middle], across which rises a knoll that joins up with the mid-city hill, Hari Parbat or Koh-i-Maran, on top of which stands the stark Afghan-era fort. In the space between the river bed and the slope on the other side, there used to be dense almond groves. In spring, this would look like a terraced, pink cotton-wool park. In the pockmarked but bristling map of memory, this river, stream, connects to another from a few years earlier, in childhood proper, when we briefly lived in the quiet idyll of Verinag in the south, home to the spring from which the big river Jhelum, Hydaspes to the ancient Greeks, emerges … On the curve of this stream, there was a little school where I studied from the third to fifth grade – it is without doubt the finest primary school in the world. Set back from the opposite bank was the house of school friends Rajesh and Sunil from whom I haven't heard in more than thirty years.

Four years ago, I went back to my childhood school for the first time in three decades, sat in the classroom I had sat in then, studied the scrawls on the ceiling in vain, and touched the door to the office of the principal who, years

later, lent her name and elegant sartorial manner to a character Shanta Koul, in my second novel *The Book of Gold Leaves*. From the school balcony, I looked at the dilapidated house across the river and I think I recognized the front columns of a porch, damaged and forgotten. Rajesh and Sunil may have left Kashmir in the exodus that took away Kashmiri Pandits (Hindus) into exile in the dark 1990s, or earlier, I don't know. Some Kashmiri Pandits were targeted, killed, by militants and in the ensuing climate of fear and loathing, they abandoned their homes and had to start new, hard lives in the hot and alien plains of India. I can't find Rajesh and Sunil on Facebook.

The three or four dead men were eventually loaded into a truck and driven away. For a fraction I thought this might be corrected soon. The dead boys were in fact not dead and they may be returned. I learnt over twenty years that they were, in effect, discarded logs of wood. I don't know who they were: combatants, innocent victims of extrajudicial killing, or militants who died fighting for a revolutionary cause, and who may or may not have committed atrocities themselves? I suppose they must remain nameless, less of identity. Then again, in that moment of seeing, the soldiers who killed them were nameless too. But they stood, because they had power. The wide gap between power and violence, and the 'power behind the violence', as Hannah Arendt demonstrates in 'Reflections of Violence', couldn't have appeared in a starker embodiment as in the image of the dead lying on the ground.[4]

In the winter of 2006, I sat down by the desk I'm sitting by now in my adopted home in London and tried to write an uninterrupted fictional tract on what it might mean to be a dead boy forgotten and unburied in the mountains. By next year, it had become a draft of my first novel, *The Collaborator*, the story of a young man forced to rummage through corpses in a hidden gorge, in search of identity cards and weapons. Each day he waits, dreading that, he may spot his childhood friends among the dead. Nearby, snaking through the meadow is a small green river.

Mirza Waheed's debut novel, *The Collaborator*, was an international bestseller, was a finalist for the Guardian First Book Award and the Shakti Bhat Prize, and longlisted for the Desmond Elliott Prize. It

was also a book of the year for *The Telegraph, New Statesman, Financial Times, Business Standard* and *Telegraph* India, among others. His second novel, *The Book of Gold Leaves*, was published in 2014 to critical acclaim. It was shortlisted for the DSC Prize for South Asian Literature 2016, longlisted for the Folio Prize, and was a finalist for the 2015 Tata Literature Live! Book of the Year (Fiction). Mirza has written for the BBC, the *Guardian*, *Granta*, *Guernica*, Al Jazeera English and *The New York Times*. His third book *Tell Her Everything* was released in early 2019.

NOTES

1 Galloway, Steven. *The Cellist of Sarajevo*, Toronto: Random House Canada, 2008.

2 Pamuk, Orhan, *Istanbul: Memories of a City*, London: Faber and Faber, 2005.

3 Scott-Clark, Cathy, 'The Mass Graves of Kashmir.' *The Guardian*, 9 July 2012, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jul/09/mass-graves-of-kashmir (accessed on 14 November 2018).

4 Arendt, Hannah, *On Violence*, San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1970.

7

My Journey towards Political Consciousness

Narrative: Khurram Parvez
Written by: Haziq Qadri

In the winter of 1989, when I entered the seventh grade, armed insurgency broke out in the Valley. As a child, I would listen to the discussions taking place around me, which held that the violence was a result of a conspiracy of the Central government to dislodge the Farooq Abdullah government in Kashmir. Being very young, I could not take part in those discussions, but I did have a strong desire to be part of them anyway.

There were other major events happening around at that time. In September that year, there had been protests outside the UN office. Tear-gas shells were fired on protestors. Some of the shells landed in the lawn of our home. These occurrences indicated to my young mind that something was going on. I recall one of my teachers who taught me in the seventh grade, Razdan sir, a very kind Kashmiri Pandit. In Burn Hall, an elite Christian missionary institution, in those days almost 50 per cent of the students were Kashmiri Pandits and Hindus. There was no discussion in the school about the things happening around us at the time. Only a few of my friends would talk about the gun battles that would take place.

Two days before the winter vacation in December 1989, someone was kidnapped. I had no idea who it was and why. But the news was abuzz and

everyone was talking about it. Soon when schools were shut, my friends and I realized the gravity of the situation. We came to know that Rubaiya Sayeed, daughter of India's the then home minister, Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, was missing. The events that unfolded in the coming days, like her release in Bohri Kadal in the old Srinagar city, and other commotion made me understand the seriousness of what had happened. The Tehreek (movement) for azadi had begun and was taking shape.

In those days, my cousin used to live in Mandir Bagh, Srinagar, adjacent to Gaw Kadal. I would go there to meet him and spend my winter vacations with him. When the uprising started, I was at Mandir Bagh. There used to be blackouts in the evenings. Nobody would put on the lights and if anyone even tried to, young boys would throw stones at that house. The blackout would go on till ten in the evening.

Those blackouts are etched in my memory. I would wonder if we were fighting against the darkness, why were we bringing more darkness into our lives. I did not think a blackout was the way towards freedom. As a child, these things confused me. The month of December in 1989 was tense. There used to be grenade blasts around, and young boys were leaving home in droves to join the armed militancy. There was total chaos in the Valley. People were supporting the Tehreek but they were also not sure if the events unfolding around were planned by the Tehreek or were random or something else.

After the Rubaiya Sayeed episode, the notion that the uprising was a conspiracy of the Indian government turned out to be false and people began to believe that the incident had really been planned by the Tehreek workers. Earlier that year, there had been firing somewhere in Bohri Kadal and four or five Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel had been killed. I remember people talking about this encounter and glorifying the HAJY group. The HAJY was an acronym for the four original JKLF militant leaders including Hamid Shiekh, Ashfaq Majeed, Javaid Mir and Yasin Malik who had become popular public heroes of the Kashmiri resistance movement. Militant groups were part of our everyday consciousness, and talking about them became a part of our mainstream life.

On 21 January 1990, a procession came out from Sonwar, Srinagar. Around 2,000 people participated in it. There was a great deal of sloganeering going on. The participants were stopped outside my home, near Gupkar, and were fired upon by the armed forces. Since it was difficult to run away from there, many of the protesters ran through the premises of our house. I saw the whole episode from inside my home, people dispersing in chaos, being chased away and fired upon. This was the first time I had heard bullet shots. It was extremely loud, and my uncle told me they had come from a .303 rifle. In the days that followed, many more such shootings took place.

On 22 January, a police vehicle stopped by my house. The officer asked for my parents. The police informed him that my grandfather had been injured in the protest. My parents left with the policeman to go to my maternal grandfather's home in Gonikhan, which is also the trade hub of Srinagar. I was not taken along, and over lunch, my relatives told me that my grandfather had been martyred the previous day.

Massive processions had been taken out from other parts of the Valley protesting the extreme brutality shown by Indian forces during a crackdown. They had also molested women, which had enraged people more. The protestors were all moving towards Gaw Kadal where they were heavily fired upon by the police and CRPF. Around fifty people had died, including my grandfather, Ali Mohammad Mir.[1]

For the next three days, I could not visit my maternal grandfather's home because of the curfew that had been imposed. On the fourth day, there was a brief respite from curfew and I joined my parents. We stayed there for one-and-a-half months, which is the usual period of mourning in a Kashmiri household. It was during this time I heard much more about martyrdom, religion and azadi. Since my grandfather was among the first martyrs, every pro-freedom leader and prominent personality visited his home. I was an inquisitive child and would ask questions of those who visited. Thus, I began to understand some of what was unfolding around me. Though these discussions took place at home as well, they seemed different here. One reason for this might have been because my paternal grandfather was a retired police official. He was disconnected from the happenings that were rocking the Valley

and due to that the socialization of my father and his siblings remained very much with those who were either part of state structure or those who had interests with state. My maternal grandfather, on the other hand, moved with the tradesmen and was in touch with the grass roots.

My father's home is in one of the poshest neigbourhoods in the Valley called Gupkar. It is a location where the erstwhile Dogras lived in their palaces, which are now used by the chief minister and most of the pro-India political elite. At that time, Allah Baksh was the senior superintendent of police (SSP) of Srinagar, and was also our neighbour. After the Gaw Kadal massacre, I was angry at him because I thought it was he who had ordered the firing which killed my grandfather. Such was the anger that whenever I used to see him, I would spit out of spite. I am sure that Allah Baksh must never have noticed my little personal tantrum, but it is indicative of the schisms that was sown against our own Kashmiris who were doing the bidding of the government.

The situation in the Valley continued to remain tense. In March 1990, protest rallies were held all over the state. The epicentre of these protests was the United Nations (UN) office. The protestors would come from every corner of the Valley to register their protest at the UN office and that made this place relevant to the Tehreek.

When protestors continued to come to the UN office, boys from Sonwar (the large neighbouring town) being enterprising, would serve them tehri (turmeric-flavoured rice) and lemon or orange juice. The work was divided among various groups, and I also took part in the service. It was my duty to distribute food packets among the protestors who would come from far-off places. Earlier, people would distribute tehri at a shrine in Sonwar, called Sayed Saeb. But after the protests broke out, people would take that same tehri to the UN offices and distribute it. Since it had turned into a place of great importance, people started calling the UN office the 'UN Saeb,' a lighter take on giving the place reverential treatment.

One of those days, a group of boys was preparing orange and lemon juice. They were mixing the two flavours. An elderly man from the locality reprimanded them and said, 'What you did to the juices, don't do that with the Tehreek (movement).' People were so concerned about the Tehreek and its

fate. Sometimes, there were demonstrations and rallies organized by different professional groups. Doctors took out the first such rally, which was led by a Dr Abdul Ahad Guru who was a well-known cardiologist. Unknown gunmen later killed Dr Guru. Similar rallies were conducted by lawyers, teachers, autorickshaw drivers and even policemen; all demanding azadi.

One day, there was a protest rally of children marching to the UN office in which I also participated. This was my first political protest. One curfew day, my uncle had happened to visit a neighbour. When he returned, some gunmen who had come in a van wearing civilian clothes stopped him outside the house gate. They tried to take him away but when other family members came out and made a noise, he was let go. Later we learnt that those gunmen were personnel from the National Security Guard (NSG).

Earlier, when such incidents happened with other families, my extended family would always discuss the issues in such a fashion as if the people themselves were to be blamed. Yet when similar fate befell us, they complained about the army's high-handedness. I pointed out to my family that similar things had happened in other places to other people and that we needed to recognize that something was wrong with the state. When more incidents like this began to take place, and with the killing of grandfather, it changed the discourse in my family. Till then my paternal family was ensconced in an ideology closer to the pro-India political elite, which encircled us in the neigbourhood.

Though school was supposed to reopen in March 1990, it stayed closed, as the situation seemed to worsen. My aunt and one Mrs Nazir – both teachers – held a meeting with other teachers and decided to ask the principal of Burn Hall to handover to them the responsibility for the school, so that they could teach us themselves. When the schools finally reopened in May, their timings were changed to keep in mind the rules of the curfew.

When I went back to school, I noticed that many Pandit students had not turned up. I had no idea that many of them had fled the Valley. As children, we had never viewed one another through the prism of religious faith or political loyalties, so their disappearance was a complete surprise to me. I missed my friends.

Shortly after, Mirwaiz Moulvi Farooq was killed [on 21 May 1990] and schools were closed for some time again. When it reopened, I noticed that one of the Pandit teachers had not turned up. It was then that I put two and two together, and realized it: the Pandits were fleeing Kashmir. A Hindu named N.D. Radhakrishan and his family lived next door to my house. As children, my friends and I used to steal apples from their orchard, and then we would be chased away. That year, when the fruits were ripe, we sneaked in to steal apples like always, but this time we were not chased by anyone. We realized that the neighbours had also left. From that day on, I never stole their fruit, because the fun of the chase was gone. Later, the house was occupied by the Intelligence Bureau who were guarded by CRPF until 1998. In this manner, I watched the militarization of the Valley from the confines of my own home.

My maternal uncle was a great influence on me. My cousins and I, inspired by him, would often talk of taking up arms to avenge the death of our grandfather. It was my uncle who often spoke of revolution and azadi and made me think of politics. He was inclined towards religion and the Tehreek. It was due to him that I acquired a basic understanding of Islam and the freedom movement. He let me sit in while he was engaged in discussions, and in this manner, I learned a lot.

In 1992, I participated in an NCC camp in Gujarat. Six hundred students came from all over India. Only nine students from Kashmir took part and all of us belonged to the Burn Hall School because no other school from the Valley had agreed to participate. In my childishness, I went to the camp with the idea that we would be trained in how to use a gun. Such was our adulation for the armed movement.

In Gujarat, we discussed Kashmir with other students from India. During the tour, when students were asked to shout Vande Mataram, my fellow Kashmiris and I chanted '*Nara-e-Takbeer, Allah-u-Akbar!*' We did this to assert our Kashmiri identity: the chants were a mere demonstration of our difference with India. Hearing our slogans, the other campers would call us terrorists. In this manner, as we grew older our politics sharpened and became palpable when we met people from outside the Valley.

Even though we were fighting for azadi back home, during the camp I realized that the other Indian students had no knowledge of what Kashmiris wanted. They were unaware of the situation in the Valley. So, when I went back, it was with the understanding that I had to speak to more people and educate them on our situation. Though I adored the armed movement – even childishly thinking that in the Gujarat camp I would be taught to use a gun – I personally realized that there were some militants and other miscreants who had, instead of serving the Tehreek, used the weapon for thuggery. There was an incident when I was in the eighth grade, when one of the students placed a pistol on the bench during an exam, implying that he should not be stopped from copying. The supervising examiner broke down after seeing this, imploring the student not to ruin his career.

On another occasion, there was a Pandit couple walking down a road in Sonwar. I was walking in the opposite direction. In an alleyway, there was a militant. When the couple passed the alleyway, the militant fired at the woman and she was hit on the leg. People in the neighbourhood took her to the hospital. There were some unethical people who had joined the militancy less for serving the Tehreek and more for running extortion rackets, which weakened the movement and created distrust for genuine fighters. Only after the militant group Hizb-ul-Mujahideen issued a statement to the effect that they should not give money to anyone who used their name and should nab the militants instead, did a sense of understanding and confidence return among the people.

After my tenth grade, I joined the Tyndale Biscoe School in Srinagar, which is the oldest Christian missionary educational institution in the Valley. Militancy was at its peak and it received people's full support. Now, our discussions about joining the militancy became more intense. One of my cousins actually became involved with armed resistance to some extent, but he later backed out. I did not approve of all the tactics the militants used and was not too enthused about joining them. My friends taunted me, calling me a coward. At the end of 1994, on the day when Shabir Shah was released from jail in Jammu, the Muslim Students' Federation (MSF) asked us to join them in a rally to receive him. I too went. When we reached near Gaalandhar,

Pampore, there was a huge traffic jam. On return, when the rally was marching towards UN office, I was on the roof of a bus and my parents spotted me. They were quite upset by my actions, but there was nothing they could do to extricate me from the rally.

When Shabir Shah reached the UN office, he addressed the gathering. Far from the rhetoric I had been expecting, his speech was quite ordinary. Later, we went to martyrs' graveyard and from there the rally marched to Lal Chowk. In Lal Chowk, Shabir Shah once again addressed the crowd, but his speech was dull and far below the expectations of those who had gathered to listen. It was then that I realized that politically, Kashmiri struggle had a long way to go because even a leader like Shabir Shah for whom people were clamouring had given no imminent plan on how to achieve azadi.

On 1 November 1994, my cousin, who was pursuing an MBBS in Bangalore, died in an accident. In January, I went with her family to Bangalore to bring back her belongings. We found that she had many books on Islamic literature. I began reading those books on the journey home, and that was how my interest in the subject arose. I decided to read the Quran again and my family appointed for me a teacher named Muneer Ahmad Dar. It was due to him that I began to read more books about religion and Islamic literature. I met many of his friends who belonged to Jamaat-e-Islami, but at that time I had no idea of this organization.

One day, my friends and I went to Pahalgam for trekking. On 4 July 1995 we set up our camp near Lidderwath, 28 km ahead of Pahalgam. There was a group of foreign tourists there as well. Suddenly a group of militants appeared and asked the tourists to line up. The tourists were playing music, which the militants asked them to turn off. The militants then asked us what we were doing in the area. When we replied that we were on a trekking expedition, they demanded to know how we could dare to sit around enjoying ourselves, not take up arms to protect those who were dying in the Valley. After this interaction, they took the passports of the foreign trekkers. There were a few women among the foreigners who were dressed in shorts, and the militants asked them to wear longer clothing. The leader of the group was one man known as Hameed Turky. We asked them where they had come from and only

one of them answered, saying he was from Dara-e-Khyber. Later, they locked my friends and me in a nearby hut. The foreigner women were sent back to their tents while the men from their group were taken away. We were warned that if we came out of the hut, we would be shot.

In my group there was a Sikh boy. He was very frightened. Such was the fear that he told me that he would be killed because he was a 'Kafir' (non-Muslim). But I assured him that he would be OK. Soon it started to rain. Our belongings were out in the open but nobody dared to come out and bring them inside. I finally mustered some courage and attended to this task myself. I asked the foreign ladies, who were crying in the camp, if I could help them in any way but they turned me away saying that they did not want to talk.

When we returned to Srinagar, we went to Ram Munshibagh Police Station to give them an eyewitness account of the previous day's incident. The police said they knew about the incident and we would be called if needed. The police responded coldly to us. News of the incident started to appear in the media quite frequently. The reports claimed it was the Al-Faran group who had abducted foreign tourists. But the militants had told us that they were from the Harkat-ul-Ansar outfit. We happened to meet a journalist from the Norwegian press. When we told them about the incident, he was stunned, perhaps more so by the fact that the police had not recorded our statement. Hurriyat leaders like Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, Syed Ali Geelani and Yasin Malik issued statements condemning the kidnapping.

From early 1996 to 1999, I was associated with Islami Jamiat-e-Talaba, the student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami. Then due to a difference of opinions and change in their policy, I left the Jamiat. In 1997, Jamaat-e-Islami stated that they had no links with Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, which I felt was not the right thing to do because that tended to criminalize the Hizb-ul-Mujahideen. I was not comfortable with that, and did not appreciate the lack of independence within the group. However, I did learn a lot from them, and inculcated a good reading habit in myself thanks to their discipline.

Soon after, one day I went to see advocate Parvez Imroz, a renowned human rights defender, who is also my father's cousin. His computer was not working, so he asked me if I could help. After I fixed it, we struck up a

conversation and we began to meet often. My extended family viewed Parvez Imroz as a socialist. I saw that he was committed to serving the people, and was very inspired by his ideals and passion. In 1998, along with some of my friends, I created the Students' Helpline group. The aim of this group was to create awareness and educate the youth about the ongoing Tehreek, our freedom movement. We used to organize different programmes like summer camps to invite members and create debate and discussion.

On 20 June 2000, thirty-eight members of the Indian civil society visited Kashmir. They helped bring together many people and formed the Jammu and Kashmir Federation of Civil Society Organizations (JKFCSO). This included the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP) led by Parvez Imroz, the Hoteliers Association, trader groups and prominent individuals like advocate Ghulam Nabi Hagroo, advocate G.N. Gowhar, Prof. Hameeda Nayeem, Kumar Wanchoo, Zaffar Mehraj and Zahir U Din. I became a part of this initiative, and began attending their meetings.

In 2001, APDP laid the foundation stone of the memorial for the disappeared persons at Eidgah in Srinagar, adjacent to the central martyrs' graveyard. When the programme had got over and the families of the disappeared and other activists were leaving, the police resorted to firing, and made it appear as if an encounter had taken place there. People ran away and in the night, the police removed the foundation stone. A case was registered against advocate Parvez Imroz and Parveena Ahanger, co-founder of the APDP.

Towards the end of 2000, one of my friends and I went to Delhi to pursue a short-term course in e-commerce. During that period, I kept up my work for APDP from Delhi. However, JKFCSO soon collapsed due to differences in the groups. Parvez Imroz, Zahir U Din and I, along with some other people, formed the Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (JKCCS) during my time in Delhi. In 2001 I got a job in Delhi, but I rejected it. The attack on the twin towers had just taken place and many Kashmiris were being harassed in the Indian capital. I did not want to stay on too long.

When I went back to Kashmir for vacation, the attack on the parliament took place. With the arrest of Afzal Guru, S.A.R. Geelani and others, Delhi did not seem a safe place for Kashmiris. So, I did not return to Delhi. In due

course, I enrolled in Kashmir University and pursued a masters course in journalism and was also working for the JKCCS.

The environment in the University of Kashmir was telling of the political turmoil. Our journalism department once invited Kuldeep Nayar, the well-known Indian journalist, to interact with the students. The students asked him about the Indian politics in Kashmir and the prevailing situation in the Valley, but he left halfway through the session. The newspapers next day reported this episode. *Greater Kashmir* had reported: 'Media Students Chase Away Kuldeep Nayar.'

Kuldeep Nayar called the vice chancellor of the Kashmir University and complained about the situation and the news report. The university authorities asked the media students to write a letter to rebut the reports. We were asked to write that they respected Kuldeep Nayar and that those who had heckled him were outsiders. Basharat Masood, who was also a student of journalism at that time, drafted the letter on behalf of all the students and we were asked to sign it.

I refused to sign the letter, and convinced others to follow my example. Only a few students did not side with me. This infuriated some of the teachers and they threatened to rusticate us. Upon receiving the threats, a few more students agreed to sign the letter, but I refused to change my stance. The head of department, dean and other teachers threatened to rusticate me, but I refused to back down. They told me not to 'play politics' inside the campus, but I pointed out that by threatening the students who had interrogated Kuldeep Nayar, they themselves were politicizing the issue. Being apolitical in Kashmir was not an option. At that point, I realized that teachers and students alike thought that the freedom movement was only the responsibility of the Hurriyat and militant groups. They always spoke about the failures of resistance leaders but never realized their own failures. Finally, faced by my stubbornness, the teachers did not create any more trouble for me.

From 2003, Aasia Jeelani who was my peer at the journalism department joined me at the JKCCS. She began editing the quarterly magazine, *Voices Unheard*. On 8 February 2004, we got news that in a village called Chittibandi of Bandipora, four persons have been used as human shields by the Indian

Army. The next morning, I arranged a vehicle and went to the site along with another colleague, Idrees Ahmad, and driver Ghulam Nabi, who lived in my neighbourhood. I called to ask Aasia if she could come, but that day she could not. When we reached, we saw a huge protest in the village. We learnt that the four men had been employed as porters by the Indian Army. When an encounter had ensued, these four men had been used as human shields, and as a result they had been killed.[2]

When we returned to follow up on the story, Aasia accompanied us. We spoke to the families of the victims, recorded their statements and tried persuading them to file a case against the army. While leaving, we were intercepted by the army and asked to show them the footage we had recorded. We refused to do it. We were told that a colonel wanted to meet us at Nadihal camp, and we were almost forcibly taken there. Later, a brigadier also came to meet us and told us to stop whatever we were doing. I told him that our job as human rights defenders was to write the truth, no matter what. We were finally let go at 9.30 at night. As a Kashmiri girl who had led a sheltered life, it was the latest in the night that Aasia had ever been home. In a way she became a pioneer for women human rights defenders in the Valley.

When the parliamentary elections were held in April that year, we decided to monitor them as usual. Civil society activists arrived from India, and we divided ourselves into ten groups to do the monitoring work. I was the coordinator of the groups. Shortly before the elections, Aasia was not feeling well, so we were not sure if she could accompany us. The night before, I called her and asked her not to come because she had been ill. But in the morning, everyone was shocked when Aasia joined us despite her ill health.

Aasia joined the team and we headed to Kupwara. Here, we heard conflicting reports. While some people told us that they had been warned by the Indian Army and told to cast their vote, others said that they had voted only because a local candidate was contesting the elections. Altogether, very few people were coming out to vote on their own and we found there was some form of coercion involved, either from the state or from the candidate or the army. There had been glaring cases of coercion in some places where the

army had threatened people, saying that if they did not find the indelible ink marks on their fingers, they would chop them off.

Such forms of coercion seemed to be institutionalized in most of the places we visited. We received reports after the elections that when people went to local MLAs (members of the legislative assembly) to discuss roads, sanitation and other basic amenities, they were turned back because they had not voted. The people were told that basic amenities would be provided to them only if they voted. Indeed, at one place in Lolab, our team and media persons present witnessed the army forcing the people to go out and vote.[3]

In Sogam High School, we found small children way below the voting age casting votes. The air seemed festive because a local candidate was contesting the elections. A mockery had been made of the elections with the blessings of the state and the military. On the way back from Sogam, I was seated in the middle seat of the Sumo vehicle. To my right was Aasia and near the left window was an activist from Bangalore named Kumar. Two other group members, Jalees Andrabi and Sadiq Ali, were sitting in the back seat. Ghulam Mohammad Reshi and Abdul Ghani Tantray, two locals who were assisting us, were sitting in the front seats, along with the driver, Ghulam Nabi.

Four army vehicles overtook us on the road. After a couple of kilometres, we saw these four vehicles taking a U-turn. So, we stopped for a while, making space for them. When we moved on, our vehicle was blasted apart. When I came around, I could not open my eyes because they were full of dust. After I finally managed to look, I realized I was in a terrible condition. My leg was almost torn off, hanging by a shred of skin. I dragged myself from the debris of the car with great difficulty. Jalees and Sadiq had managed to come out from the back. The driver had been killed. Aasia was in terrible condition. Her shirt had ridden up a little above her waist, and despite her gruesome wounds, she was intent on pulling it down to protect her modesty. She called my name twice and I assured her I was by her side. She could not open her eyes. Then she started calling her mother's name.

For twenty-five minutes, we lay there without any help. The army men were standing nearby, but they did not help and when the local people came to aid us, the army did not allow them to come close. Later, the police came and

we were taken in an ambulance to the primary health centre in Sogam where we were given first aid. The doctors said that Aasia would not survive, but they expressed hope for me. They sent me in an ambulance to Srinagar. When I insisted that Aasia be sent along with me, they finally put her into a Sumo vehicle. Incidentally, she reached Srinagar before I did.

On the way, I called my family and told them that I was fine, not divulging that I was badly wounded. I was admitted in SMHS Hospital [Shri Maharaja Hari Singh Hospital] and later due to the scale of my injuries referred to SKIMS [Sher-i-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences]. When my relatives arrived, I told them that Aasia had passed away and they must attend her funeral since I could not. They kept telling me Aasia was OK. But I had a gut feeling that my family was protecting me by lying while the truth was that Aasia was no more. I was right. My comrade was gone.

In the operation theatre, I told the doctor to amputate my leg, but he tried to assure me that it would be treated. I was there for seventeen days, during which I was operated upon almost six times. I sank twice because of the loss of blood. Finally, on 5 May, my leg was amputated. During those days, every resistance leader including Syed Ali Geelani, Shabir Shah and Yasin Malik visited me. Yasin came every day to be by my side.

While I was in the hospital, a police officer from Sogam police station came to record my statement. He told me that the men who had planted the bomb had been in the army camp, but he asked me not to reveal this information to anyone. Riyaz Masroor, a Kashmiri journalist, had written a front-page article that was full of praise for me. I was embarrassed by it; I did not think that I had contributed to the cause by losing something myself. 'The real contribution is my work,' I thought, and I still think so today.

My family took me to Delhi for further treatment. In Delhi, I got a call from someone who introduced himself as Mushtaq Ahmad of the Hizb-ul-Mujahideen. He apologized to me and said that militants of the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), who had mistaken our identity, had carried out the attack. I told him what the policeman had said to me, about it being army personnel who had planted the bomb. After listening to this, Mushtaq was shocked and confused, so I asked him to ascertain the facts about the blast.

In September, I was given an artificial limb. Though my life was changed, I was still unable to move past the incident, and continued to wonder who had been behind the attack on the Sumo vehicle.

In 2007, the *Indian Express* carried a story about one Captain Sumit Kohli.[4] The army had stated that he had committed suicide but Sumit's mother was refuting these claims. Sumit Kohli had written a letter to his mother stating that on 20 April 2004, four porters had been killed in a fake encounter in Lolab and then labelled as foreign militants from the LeT. He had also written letters to the families of those four porters, asking them to collect the bodies. Bearing this in mind, his mother claimed that her son's death was a conspiracy aimed to suppress the truth and demanded an investigation.

When I read the news, I realized that the fake encounter had taken place on the same day that we were attacked. And this fake encounter had been carried out just two hours after that attack and just two kms away from the spot where we were attacked. When the army tried to hold a press conference following the fake encounter, Captain Sumit Kohli had protested. Perhaps the army wanted to show that foreign militants were present in the Valley, and they wanted to attribute the attack on our group to these people, who were actually porters from R.S. Pura, all of whom were Hindus.

I went back to Sogam to ascertain the details of this report, but I could not find anything. Finally, after several years I gained access to an official document that was basically an investigative report of the police, which is primarily regarding the killing of four porters in the fake encounter and the subsequent disappearance of the bodies of the two victims. According to this document the army had informed some Gujjar families at Chontwaliwar village in Ganderbal that these two bodies are of their sons who were militants and had been killed by army in an encounter. These Gujjar families, unlike the normal routine in Kashmir, got the bodies exhumed and transferred them to Chontwaliwar village. The police has been persuading the Chontwaliwar families for many years to allow them to exhume the bodies so that DNA tests of those two bodies can be carried out to establish if they are of those porters from R.S. Pura. Sources in the police told me that the attack may have been a

conspiracy by the army meant to kill me. To legitimize the whole scene, they staged the fake encounter with the four porters.

This incident was life-changing. I had lost a limb and my close comrade. After finishing my masters, I never even once thought of any other job than the one I had already taken up as life's cause. So many people had been killed, including Aasia, and the idea of thinking about a career or a job seemed like a betrayal to those who had given their life to the Tehreek. There have been so many challenges in my life since. Many times, people have pitied me for my physical handicap. But I refuse to let anything stop me.

My human rights activism with JKCCS kept moving from strength to strength. On 30 July 2005, JKCCS conducted a public programme, People's Vision, in Srinagar. We invited Omar Abdullah and Yasin Malik to the seminar. The idea was to discuss the Kashmir issue and resistance in a mainstream manner. The programme was successful and we held more such programmes, and they became very popular. Through such efforts I wanted to inculcate accountability and transparency regarding the politics and struggles of Jammu and Kashmir. I have always believed that my job is to act as a watchdog, to make people aware of their civil liberties, especially as an occupied nation.

I have received many awards in recognition for my work, including the Irfan Kathwari Foundation Award and Reebok Human Right Award, which was accompanied by a cash prize of $50,000. I donated this award money to JKCCS. We have a small office overlooking the Jehlum. It is full of volunteers at any given day; these are people who are pursuing the dream of Kashmir's freedom and documenting brutal human rights violations. I feel my comrades and I at the JKCCS are memory keepers, patiently documenting, writing and releasing reports, which are becoming a credible source on Kashmir's political turmoil and why it has unceasingly clamoured for azadi.

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Haziq Qadri is a Kashmiri journalist based in New Delhi. He is currently working as a multimedia journalist with Brut India.

NOTES

1 See Mathur, Shubh, 'The Forgotten Massacres', Chapter 2 in *The Human Toll of the Kashmir Conflict*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

2 Bhat, Saima, 'Human Shields', *Kashmir Life*, 29 April 2017, https://kashmirlife.net/human-shields-issue-04-vol-09-139195/ (accessed on 7 July 2018).

3 For details, see, 'Independent Election Observers Team Report: J&K State Assembly Elections 2002', J&K Coalition of Civil Society, Srinagar, 2002 and 2004.

4 For more details, see, 'Did anonymous letter lead to Captian Kohli's death,' *NDTV,* 10 September 2010, https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/did-anonymous-letter-lead-to-captain-kohlis-death-431175 (accessed on 27 October 2017); Raj Kalpita, 'On the Mysterious Death of Our Brave Army Officer Capt.Sumit Kohli – Part-1', Sulekha, n.d. http://creative.sulekha.com/on-the-mysterious-death-of-our-brave-army-officer-capt-sumit-kohli-part-1_269204_blog (accessed on 27 October 2017).

8

To be Kashmiri in the Present: Politics, Ethics, and History in the Work of Akhtar Mohiuddin

Mohamad Junaid

What can a man say; words fail. Reason and thought disappear. All delusions about oneself turn out to be what they are: mere sketches on water … I have seen much and understood some things. With the help of friends, I bring my work to my nation … But when the physical body has become frail and the animal soul within is about to take flight, there is hardly anything one can say about one's lifelong work. I leave the judgement to the reader – and, I am also my own reader.

– Akhtar Mohiuddin, prologue to *Seven One Nine Seven One and Other Short Stories*

1

HERE is a story I first heard from my mother. One day, in the early 1990s, when Kashmir was simmering in rebellion against the Indian state, a paramilitary soldier is said to have peered over the wall into Akhtar Mohiuddin's compound in Lal Bazaar, Srinagar, and impudently asked the old writer if there was an aatankwadi ('terrorist') hiding inside. Mohiuddin, who was lying on the grass and soaking in the spring sun, stood up and replied sardonically, 'I am the only aatankwadi here, and I fight with my pen.'

Over the years, I have heard about this incident from several people, including Mohiuddin's son, Azhar Hilal. Those who knew Mohiuddin personally narrate the incident to stress the sense of outrage with which he saw

the world around him fall apart, including his own intimate one. For others, the incident shows his acumen for courageous wit – even an ironic detachment – for which his writings have come to be known.

Mohiuddin's work came to me in fragments, mostly from my mother.[1] Around the time the incident with the soldier took place, I was probably ten years old. My mother was still at the university, studying Kashmiri literature for a master's degree. To be at the university was a tenacious moment in her personal journey. She was a *gaameh koor* – the term townspeople would snidely use to designate young Kashmiri Muslim women from the countryside. My mother, however, embraced the term like a badge. Between raising three children, working as a teacher, and tenderly walking the line with her dyspeptic in-laws, she wrote poetry. To her, writing poetry was a deeply personal, even a religious striving rather than just a pursuit of literary finesse. However, it was afsana, or the tradition of Kashmiri short-story writing – for which Mohiuddin had come to be known – which she thought had a truly promising future within the fledgling world of Kashmiri creativity.

At our home in Islamabad in south Kashmir, my mother built a little library of Kashmiri literature, investing considerable effort to locate and then use her meagre salary to buy works published in Srinagar. She would insist that the library was hers alone; my father – falling too quickly for the rumour that Kashmiri mujahids in 1990 were not taking a lenient view of people who had any association with communism – had burnt all his Soviet-era political tracts and Russian literature, which had been his contribution to the library. While he eventually came to regret this knee-jerk reaction, to his credit it was also a time when many in Kashmir were euphoric about the retreat of the Soviets from Afghanistan, and communism had got a bad name. To my mother, however, my father's act had been nothing less than arson. It had also vindicated her position that the lack of faith in communism – the *idea* of faith itself – was the ultimate source of its weakness.

My parents didn't much agree with each other when it came to literature. Routinely, when my mother would finish writing a new poem, and then read it to the four of us – my father, my two younger sisters and me – the two of them would get into a tiff over its structure or quality. Invariably, my mother

would accuse my father of being an unfair critic, and – if I remember correctly – suggest he cultivate roohaniyat (mystical sensibilities) to appreciate the *true* meaning of poems, as his jadeediyat (modernism) made him only perceptive of appearances. In response, my father, who had briefly flirted with the Kashmiri Left progressivism of the 1970s, would mumble his scorn for the 'spiritless spirituality' of Sufi poetry. If they agreed on any aspect of Kashmiri literature, it was afsana, and, in particular, Akhtar Mohiuddin's status in that tradition.

My mother would sometimes pick out Mohiuddin's short stories to read to me. Some of them were dark and grim, and I couldn't understand their meaning. My mother would insist that meaning was important, that all of Mohiuddin's stories had a deeper meaning. But there were also stories that had ironic plots or were full of dark humour. They would make us laugh together.

Listening to my mother read, I would picture Mohiuddin as an old man with a calm but solemn expression on his face. Sitting at his desk in a loose, grey-and-dark robe, his sparse white hair softly gleaming in the late autumn sun, his unkempt beard long enough to touch the edge of the paper in front of him, he would dip his reed pen into a Chelpark inkpot and write in expansive gestures. Right to left – for Kashmiri, like other languages that use the Nastaliq script, is written right to left. There was no picture of him then. Years later, when I saw his photograph for the first time, my Tolstoyan image of Mohiuddin was totally shattered.

From the photograph, Mohiuddin appeared more harried than saint-like. With a taut frame barely hiding early malnourishment, his skin seemed beaten into wrinkles, not so much by age as years of rough work and long exposure to the bright sun. Most prominently, his piercing brown eyes, set deep on either side of his typically hooked Kashmiri nose, looked transfixed by some looming event. Or was it fright at the idea that the moment being captured held potential both of a significant claim made on a space of narration historically denied to a Kashmiri Muslim, and the great responsibility it placed on him as an intellectual of his disinherited people? I surmised that if he appeared anxious and paralysed by the act of having his picture taken, there must be a history to it. Like any Kashmiri who has lived to see the two major political transitions in modern Kashmir – the deceptive one from the Dogra monarchy

to Indian rule in 1947, and then the furious plunge into mass upsurge in 1990 – Mohiuddin's figure represented a humanity crushed under the weight of history.

Over the years, I have returned to my mother's little library. Each time, I feel pulled towards Mohiuddin's works. I strain to read the Kashmiri in which it is written (a language we were never trained to read or speak in school, even though it was our mother tongue), and struggle with the coarse quality of the paper it is printed on. Yet, once past these vexations, his words often put me in a melancholic mood. The melancholia arises, I believe, from the way his work simultaneously carries traces of a sense of place now only faintly visible in the ruins of the Kashmir's present, and the prophetic warnings of an implacable, impending future, which holds no promise of a determinable outcome.

As I came to see it, the 'sense of place' that suffuses Mohiuddin's work is one refined over ages in equal measure by the simplicity of the practical aspects of life in Kashmir, and the intricacies of the warp and woof of its cultural production. Accordingly, the quintessential Kashmiris in Mohiuddin's stories are the peasant and the weaver. Placing them at the heart of many of his stories, however, is not an intuitive act alone. Century after century of imperial disregard for the Kashmiri sense of place has primarily been marked by an incessant chaining of the peasant to the land and tethering of the weaver to the loom. The peasant and the weaver were two historical figures on the backs of whose unremitting labour Kashmir's rulers built their fortunes, but whose resilience equally represented for Mohiuddin an existential riddle, as well as an abject lesson in history. He desperately sought to articulate this riddle in ethical terms by asking what it meant to be Kashmiri in the present, while staring into the face of history, hoping to see signs of a break in the cycle.

I believe my mother read Mohiuddin to immerse herself in his perspective of Kashmir as a place, and how he articulated its existential predicaments. My father read him to find a way out of the tormented Kashmiri present, one marked by chronic, all-round violence. To be fair, my father, like so many other Kashmiris of his generation, felt trapped by the political impasse in Kashmir between 1947 and 1989, and anxiously looked for signs of transformation. Still, I couldn't understand why his generation never threw

themselves into the situation to create opportunities for change, like those who had come before them (who had participated in the 1931 movement for emancipation) or those who came after (the generation that led the 1990s movement for independence).

Mohiuddin himself was not part of my parents' generation. Born in 1928, he came of age at a time when Kashmiri national leaders forged a coalition of the vast impoverished peasantry and the underclass of urban artisans to successfully overthrow the yoke of the Dogra monarchy. But this optimistic generation was dealt a swift defeat by the events of 1947, when in a volte face, some of the same national leaders, instead of delivering the promised freedom, helped deliver Kashmir to new masters from India. Unlike many in the literary circles, who adjusted their craft to the new realities or sought state patronage, Mohiuddin kept his outrage smouldering. For my parents' generation – at least those who knew of Mohiuddin's work, and desired transformation – he was among the few principled writers left, one who couldn't be 'contracted to write', and who could be trusted with his vision.

Of course, my own reading of Mohiuddin took place at a time of resistance, in an era when Kashmiris challenged the post-1947 political order, a time whose coming Mohiuddin had predicted, but whose consequences he could not have foreseen. In many ways, defying my mother's advice, I have resisted the temptation to interpret Mohiuddin's work in search of deeper existential truths alone, and unwittingly followed my father in seeking signs of an emancipated future, an end to the occupation.

From the days when I first heard my mother read his stories to me, Mohiuddin has sketched an unorthodox map of Kashmir in my mind. His map of Kashmir was beautiful and full of hope, and therefore invisible to the Occupation. It allowed me, as a child growing up during a chaotic 'war of independence' in the 1990s, to find a sense of direction and to locate our place in the world.

To tell the story of Akhtar Mohiuddin is to begin to uncover clues to an alternative story of Kashmir itself, and to an ethical ideal for a collective life presently denied its full dignity.

2

I am getting ahead of myself here. I will contextualize below in some detail the political developments around the time when my parents' generation must have first begun to read Mohiuddin's work in order to understand how he became an exemplary witness to a claustrophobic period of Kashmir's history, 1947–90, and why his work remains so crucial to my own generation, which grew up under a violent military occupation. But let me first say something which I think needs to be stated unambiguously, even if it might be seen as unconventional for an empathic reader to say of a beloved writer: I do not think Akhtar Mohiuddin should be read as a 'great writer'. He never saw himself in those terms. While he did seek to examine the mysteries of the human condition, he didn't do so in ways never done before, or in a pioneering way comparable to someone like Tolstoy.

The way I see it, Mohiuddin explored existential themes in *necessary relation* to being Kashmiri, and for a specific purpose: to expand the interior space of the Kashmiri *being*, both imagined as a historical figure, dehumanized by subjugation as well as an emergent subject struggling to articulate his or her rights.

I have come to see Mohiuddin's life and work as important to Kashmir's cultural memory for another significant reason: he is among those who continued to believe, at a time when few in Kashmir did, that 1947 was not the end of history. To him, bowing to a false dawn of freedom was no less sacrilegious than bowing to false gods. History may have stricken his frail body but he never let it paralyse his imagination. As such, if there is one thing in his work that reverberates like a primal cry, it comes in the form of a prophecy.

What was this prophecy? As a young Kashmiri thrown into the exhilarating yet chaotic events of 1990, to me, Mohiuddin's words represented a rare clarity, one shorn of the ruses of bureaucratic power as well as political hypocrisy. Every time I read him, I felt he had sensed the inevitability of dramatic events in Kashmir, and it had all duly come to pass in his own lifetime. Having lived through the fragility of the period between 1947 and

1990, when political artifice in Kashmir was stretched to the limit, Mohiuddin had seen the events of 1990 as inevitable, something Kashmiris had to face. His novel *Jahnamuk Panun Panun Naar* ('Each to His Own Hellfire'), written several years before the upheaval, was dedicated to the 'youth who will pick up the first gun to cleanse the society'. When I heard my mother read from it for the first time, I felt that the writer had secretly met the rebels. I would imagine the young Ashfaq Majeed and Hamid Shiekh, when they were still alive, rowing a boat on the Dal Lake up to Hazratbal, sitting in front of Mohiuddin under the shade of autumn-red chinars to learn the secrets of Kashmir's past. I hoped that they did learn from Mohiuddin, for then their desire for freedom would be even stronger.

More remarkable to me was the fact that what lay ahead didn't frighten Mohiuddin. Anything that could shake Kashmir out of its morass of despondency and gruelling political limbo was welcome to him. Unlike the dreamers of the pre-1947 era, who wanted to reorient Kashmir's history to correspond with the interests of its people, the events of 1990 were a revolt against history itself, against a history that had proven to be cold and unjust. Let me also say that Mohiuddin was not given to an easy belief in the imminent possibility of change, a lesson he had learnt from history. He rested his hope on the quirky energy of the subaltern resolve, that even a momentary disruption of the arrangement of power might once again regroup the peasant and the weaver. As we will see, during this time, Mohiuddin even sought to ground this hope by suturing together an alternative originary narrative, which, in my view, remains the most playful as well as unsuspectingly incisive attempt at revisionist historiography in Kashmir. Below, I will briefly contextualize his life, his literary work, and then outline some of the salient aspects of his revisionist account of the story of Kashmir's origin.

3

There is hardly anything of consequence in Kashmir on which Akhtar Mohiuddin didn't have a unique opinion. If he questioned social conservatism and revealed the artifice of Kashmiri politics in his afsanas, he also dug deep

into the Indian nationalist historiography on Kashmir to unsettle its claims. Given the range of his writings, one would expect any serious effort to understand the myriad intricacies of Kashmiri society and politics, and not least its cultural life, to require a detour through Mohiuddin's works. But his writings have become obscured in the bureaucratic milieu of Kashmiri literature. Those who have surveyed the history of Kashmiri literature have, in my view, not given Mohiuddin his due. Sadly, literary historians in Kashmir often tend to accord importance to the social capital of Kashmiri writers, which was, until a few years ago, accrued only through recognition by the Indian political establishment. The expressive power of a literary work and its creative engagement with socio-political questions often remains under-appreciated, even disapproved.

Trilokinath Raina, one of the better-known of these literary historians, only briefly mentions Mohiuddin in his book *A History of Kashmiri Literature.*[2] He expends much of the book on Kashmiri poetry – rightly so, as poetry has had a longer and more continuous history than other literary forms in Kashmir. But in the small section on Kashmiri afsana, the most vibrant and popular tradition in Kashmiri prose, Raina repeats only stock remarks on Mohiuddin, the pioneer and arguably the most successful proponent of this tradition. He appreciates the latter's ability to weave 'complex plots', develop 'interesting characters', and engage in 'inner monologues'. But such dimensions of writing for a writer in the latter half of the twentieth century are not unique feats. While Raina correctly presents Mohiuddin's work as a contrast to the 'simplistic tales' of the Progressive Writers' Movement – the socialist writers' collective invested heavily in the class question – of which Mohiuddin was a part in the early 1950s (we will have more to say about this ahead) and as someone who introduced the 'stream of consciousness' technique to Kashmiri writing, he tends to look away from the political significance of Mohiuddin's writings, even where they step directly on to political terrain.

For instance, Raina presents 'Jalli's Broken Teeth', a haunting story of a young woman who is sexually assaulted while trying to save her father from marauding Indian soldiers, as a motivated story simply about 'police excesses'. In my view, the story represents a struggle with its own narrative ethics, about

how to describe a form of violence unheard of in Kashmir previously. It is a comment on how raw domination tends to create a void in the language itself. Raina, however, dismisses it as 'tendentious writing' with a 'preconceived plot'. But Kashmiris who have experienced the Occupation will probably read it as viscerally conveying a sense of everyday precariousness in their homeland.

In my search, I have found a biographical note on Mohiuddin by Ghulam Nabi Khayal,[3] a veteran Kashmiri journalist, poet and critic, useful, even if ultimately inadequate – again because Mohiuddin's work is inexplicably severed from the politics of his times. Writing mostly from personal memory – he had known Mohiuddin as a friend – Khayal's note includes a brief account of Mohiuddin's childhood experiences as well as a rather tedious one on the low-level government jobs Mohiuddin held during his life.

In my view, Mohiuddin's employment history hardly brings to light anything of much significance in his writings, except that he had staved off his pecuniary anxieties. Mohiuddin's childhood experiences, on the other hand, seem to be formative of his general outlook on life and provide clues to some of his writings on loss and pain. From Khayal's account, we learn of the grinding poverty of Mohiuddin's family, the early loss of his mother, and then of the death of his elder sisters to whom Mohiuddin was deeply devoted. We learn about Batehmalyun, the neighbourhood in Srinagar in which Mohiuddin grew up: how the neighbourhood was first razed in the mid-1930s, how its residents were viciously suppressed by the Dogra state forces in 1945, and finally how the Indian troops stationed nearby turned it into ashes in 1965. Elements of all of these experiences appear, one way or another, in all of Mohiuddin's short stories. Khayal talks of Mohiuddin telling him that his family's struggles with poverty and the abject condition of his neighbourhood had turned him into a 'rebel'.

Indeed, to be born a Kashmiri Musalman was to be bitter all the time. Yet, aside from an occasional short story, like 'Despair', which was about the loss of his sisters, Mohiuddin's writings hardly show any lingering sign of resentment, and appear reconciled to his past. Loss and pain, however, never left him. In the last phase of his life, during the turbulent 1990s, he lost his beloved son and his son-in-law; the former was killed in the crossfire between Indian

soldiers and Kashmiri fighters and the latter at the hands of 'unknown gunmen' during a bungled robbery. Yet again, his writings in this period seem to have remained unaffected, even though, as his surviving son Azhar Hilal told me, the events left Mohiuddin devastated. Remarkably, as if foreseeing his own fate through his work, the main characters in many of his short stories have lost their beloved children (his story 'Yearning' from 1950 being an example); and these writings had appeared prior to the death of his own son and son-in-law. As Mohiuddin himself would say of his writings, personal loss had little meaning in a place where death and destruction had become a general experience. To me, the dead children in his writings are a metaphor; they represent the impossibility of a future under the Occupation.

4

It is not hard to fathom why a certain stoicism would inescapably become a part of the creative life of Kashmiris. Historically, there have been several such precedents in Kashmir. The nineteenth-century mystical poets Shamas Faqir, who was a weaver, and Wahab Khar, who came from a peasant background, immediately come to mind. Both endured the drudgery of their unrewarding work under the Dogra rule, yet neither left any major traces of that life in their spiritual verses. Since both lived and died in a world of incessant oppression, their poetry took on an other-worldly sensibility, oriented away from the possibility of meaning in this world.

In contrast, Mohiuddin had briefly witnessed the hope for a dignified life. This hope had been generated by the mid-twentieth- century decolonization moment, which gave birth to a new idiom of rights. To his generation, 'Naya [New] Kashmir' was more than a document that the National Conference had adopted as a manifesto in 1944. Grounded in the idea of popular Kashmiri sovereignty, its call for the political and economic emancipation of Kashmiris represented a radical reorganization of the Kashmiri Muslim subjectivity, a subjectivity that had remained disarticulated by the Dogra monarchy's casteist, Hindu supremacist vision. But while decolonization continued elsewhere, in Kashmir this hope crumbled. As Mohiuddin told Khayal,

> Since childhood I was in a war. There was no escape. Poverty taught me rebellion against everything, against parents, against society, and against the Maharaja's autocratic rule … I was thinking something new, something I could devote my life to. To find this 'new', I firmly supported the Naya Kashmir programme. But it just remained a book, fodder for the bookworms … It was conspiracy; the whole struggle was lost, and the passion around the Naya Kashmir was killed.

The anti-monarchical struggle of the pre-1947 era had been successful, but the fleeing Dogra monarch, as a parting shot, handed Kashmir to India without the consent of his mostly Muslim subjects. With this neo-colonization of Kashmir, the promise of liberation, for which Kashmiris had thrown themselves behind their leaders, petered out.

By the mid-1950s, when writers of Mohiuddin's generation came of age and began to write, India's political elite, who had been preaching anti-colonial politics only a few years earlier, were beating Kashmiris into submission, much the same way Indians themselves had been beaten by their erstwhile colonial rulers. While 1947 was celebrated elsewhere in the subcontinent as the year of independence, in Kashmir it came to be seen as the beginning of yet another calamitous tyranny.[4]

The neo-colonization of Kashmir was accompanied by the classic 'carrot and stick' strategy. Loyalty to Indian rule was rewarded, and opposition to it suppressed and discredited. As the Indian stranglehold on Kashmiri public life grew, many writers of Mohiuddin's generation calibrated their erstwhile radical stances and either took flight into new forms of mysticism or cosied up to power.[5] Mohiuddin's imagination, however, remained unconstrained by political exigencies. He chose to represent the desperation of ordinary Kashmiris in relentless, unvarnished prose. And despite attempts to soften him with state accolades, Mohiuddin's candid writings made him something of an outsider in the closed and closely controlled world of Kashmiri literature.

More needs to be said about this era, which in my view is pivotal to understanding Mohiuddin's work. The 1950s were a decade of surprises in Kashmir. It was a decade that led Kashmiris to doubt their own integrity as a nation, an ailment that continues to infect the present. Sheikh Abdullah, the then prime minister of Kashmir and a trusted acolyte of India's prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, was taken prisoner early one day in 1953 at Nehru's behest.

Abdullah was crestfallen. Not too long before, the two had publicly stated their inseparable political union in Srinagar with a famous Farsi quatrain that expresses the spiritual union between the Sufi master and his disciple: *I have become you, and you me/ I am the body, you the soul/ So that no one can say hereafter/ That you are someone and me someone else*.[6]

While Abdullah's brusque style of anti-monarchical politics and upholding of the land redistribution programme had made him popular among the Kashmiri masses, he had already overplayed his luck by endorsing the decamping monarch's 'accession' to India. He expected Nehru, who had often waxed eloquent about the right to self-determination of colonized peoples, to respect his promise of allowing Kashmiris to determine their own political future. But Nehru, with a longer view of history than Abdullah's, nursed imperial fantasies. Going by his speeches immediately after India's independence, it should have been quite apparent that instead of being the democrat his biographers present him as, Nehru saw himself as a worthy successor to Ashoka and Akbar, two of South Asia's most powerful emperors of the ancient and the medieval period.

Abdullah, on the other hand, heady after his ostensible successes against the Dogra monarchy, turned out to be a novice. He remained obsessively wary of the Pakistani shark gobbling up Kashmir and, in the process, ended up landing Kashmir in the labyrinthine guts of the Indian whale. Despite occasional chest thumping, such as when he arrested the right-wing Hindu leader Syama Prasad Mookerjee for entering the state without permission, Abdullah never truly understood the nature of what is called Hindutva – a blend of Brahminical mytho-geography and Hindu supremacism. Not only did the Dogra royalty share deep ideological ties with Hindutva, but the latter had effectively underwired the dominant expressions of the Indian nationalist narrative.[7] For instance, despite his paeans to secularism, Nehru's empire was to be at least *territorially* achieved based on the Hindutva 'idea of India', in which Kashmir (sans its Muslim population) was an organic part of the sacred geo-body of Mother India, or *Bharat Mata*.[8]

Mohiuddin and his peers had seen the diabolical face of Hindutva. The news of ethnic cleansing of the Muslims of Jammu in 1947 had reached many

ears in Kashmir, despite Abdullah's minions suppressing it. It was an outrageous event, a sustained violence planned and abetted by the monarchy in cahoots with Hindu militias, in which more than 200,000 Muslims were killed and half a million expelled. Noting both Nehru's and Gandhi's deafening silence on these events, Mohiuddin and his fellow writers could no longer trust the Indian Congress leaders' anti-colonialism. They felt vindicated regarding their suspicions of Nehru's mala fides in 1953, but were powerless before the short-sighted Abdullah, who remained personally loyal to Nehru despite the latter unceremoniously overthrowing him. The only redeeming feature of the post-1947 political fiasco was the land redistribution and debt relief programme carried out during the few years Abdullah enjoyed some degree of power in Kashmir, before his arrest.

5

The end of the monarchy, followed by land redistribution, briefly made it possible to see political freedom as achievable. The works of the Progressive Writers' Movement represented the mood of the time. Prominent representatives of this movement included Rahman Rahi, Dina Nath Nadim and Ghulam Nabi Khayal.[9] progressive writers in Kashmir – Muslims and Hindus – had turned away from the devotional and mystical literature of the previous years and begun exploring material and existential questions. Feudalism, which the land redistribution programme had abolished but whose cultural remnants persisted, was a major theme. In these writings, a peasant hero, or an enlightened subaltern trapped by feudalism, would often take it upon himself to upturn the order and fight against an unjust and cruel landlord.

Even though it was only in the aftermath of the land redistribution programme that such feudal divisions increasingly came into sharp view, the progressive writers nevertheless acted to ideologically buttress Abdullah's position as the voice of the subaltern. Some of these writers believed, much like Abdullah, that Nehru was a sympathetic ally in the fight against class enemies. But within a short span of time, when Nehru's reality and 'realism'

dawned on them, they had to make tough choices and they largely chose *not* to make them. Most grew quiet, and receded into the background, or became what some Kashmiris now call 'contract writers', the ideological analogues of pro-India politicians.

But as the effects of land redistribution spread, voices for Kashmir's independence grew. Internationally, Kashmir had been recognized as a 'dispute' between India and Pakistan. The two countries regularly sparred over Kashmir in the United Nations, and occasionally the Indian delegation would bring along a Kashmiri from Abdullah's camp, or Abdullah himself, to contest Pakistani arguments. But busy restructuring Europe into separate spheres of influence, the Big Powers at the UN took limited interest in Kashmir, which worked to India's advantage. Relaxed externally and determined to change realities internally to complicate any future resolution, India adopted an aggressive stance in Kashmir, even eroding the minimal guarantees of Kashmir's powers over spheres of socio-political life agreed to in the 1947 Instrument of Accession.[10]

Abdullah's arrest was one of the consequences of this aggressive stance. Ostensibly, he began showing signs of impatience with India and wanted a referendum to be conducted. But the real reasons were different. The remnants of the old Dogra political order, dispossessed of their estates and privileges, found common cause with the Indian state. By jailing Abdullah, they wanted to stem the tide of Kashmiri subalterns becoming subjects who demanded rights and made claims on the land. To their chagrin, they failed to arrest the economic reordering that land redistribution had ignited. It was in the sphere of statist politics that the return of the ancien régime proved effective. There wasn't a return to monarchy as such, but the former feudals now controlled Kashmir through the instruments of the Indian state.

The 1953 coup was carried out with help from Kashmiri proxies who had formerly been comrades of Abdullah but dismissed Kashmiri freedom as 'impractical'. Through legislative manoeuvring and repressive measures, the promise of national freedom was rolled back. The Progressive Writers' Movement, faced with a choice of resistance, faded away.

6

Mohiuddin regularly attended the weekly meetings of the progressive writers at their well-known haunt in Srinagar's Koker Bazaar. He published some of his early writings in their in-house magazine *Kong'posh* from 1952 till 1955, and even received his nom de plume 'Akhtar' from fellow Progressive Writer Bansi Nirdosh.

Socialism was the reigning ideology of the group. The 'progressive writers' label had, however, covered a whole gamut of writerly sensibilities, which were not always congruous with one another. These ranged from aspirations for radical socio-economic transformation on the lines of the Soviet Union, to simply a provocative questioning of the existence of God. Some enterprising writers, one joke goes, had even talked about starting a 'No God Movement'. The phrase was to be only verbally spoken in English and never written down. If a religious conservative asked them about this blasphemous movement, the writers were to respond saying, 'What is wrong with the "Know God Movement"?'

To their moralist detractors, the progressive movement was about creating an ideological space and projecting an idiosyncratic self-image within a predominantly Muslim society in which they could safely drink. Betrayed by Nehru's volte-face on socialism and self-determination, and nagged by the religious conservatives at home, the progressives had begun to tiptoe away from any political programme – and it is not unlikely that drinking itself became a sardonic new paradigm for radical politics.

Nevertheless, writers associated with the progressive movement made certain choices that acted like a flicker in the dark that had descended on the emerging literary scene in Kashmir by the mid-1950s. Not only were they among the first in the new generation to switch to writing in Kashmiri, but also to writing in the everyday Kashmiri idiom. Kashmiri language, they argued, had been impoverished by centuries of neglect amid royal patronage afforded to languages of power – Sanskrit, Farsi and eventually Urdu. To reach the masses, which were supposed to be both the generalized new audience for

literature as well as the raw clay that needed to be moulded into radical subjects, neither the official languages nor the esoteric Kashmiri of Sufi verse was adequate.

It must be noted here that popular Kashmiri had been used in poetic tradition in Kashmir long before the progressives thought they had discovered it. Kashmiri poets of the nineteenth century, like Rasul Mir, Mahmud Gami and even Shamas Faqir had used colloquial Kashmiri, which is why their poetry was widely popular among the unlettered masses, who not only rendered their poetry into festive or mournful songs but also turned them into axioms for everyday ethics. What was significant about the intervention of the progressives was the reinforcement of the idea of deploying everyday Kashmiri in literary forms for political mobilization and consciousness building. On this count, they were taking their lead from the previous generation of poets like Abdul Ahad Azad and Ghulam Ahmed Mehjoor, both pioneers of the jadeed (modern) poetry in Kashmir in the early decades of the twentieth century.

In popularizing Kashmiri literature, the progressive writers faced an uphill task. Effectively relegated to a secondary status compared to Urdu, which continued as the official language after 1947, Kashmiri literature often took recourse to the radio to register its presence. Then there was the lingering dispute concerning the script for Kashmiri. Muslim Kashmiri writers preferred Nastalik script (which is also the script of Urdu and Farsi), while Hindu Kashmiri writers increasingly preferred Devanagari (which is the script of Hindi). Several attempts were made to standardize the script and arrive at a consensus. These attempts largely failed, and the readership of Kashmiri literature always remained limited and divided.

The post-1947 period of political and societal crisis had a transformative influence on Mohiuddin's choice of literary language as well. Till 1955, he had written a few forgettable pieces in Urdu. But he became among the first to get involved with popularizing Kashmiri. For him, the status of Kashmiri was not unrelated to the status of the Kashmiri people under Indian rule. In the meetings of the progressive writers, where some members had made their pro-India leanings explicit while others felt unable to express their political opinions openly, Mohiuddin would often emphasize this relation by

suggestively quoting Kim Beasley Sr, who was Australia's education minister and an advocate of schooling Aboriginal children in their mother languages: 'To deny a people an education in their own language, wherever it is possible, is to treat them as a conquered people.'[11]

Mohiuddin's major contribution to the development of Kashmiri language during this time was to create a Kashmiri dictionary. He strongly backed a consensus on the script, an effort that ultimately failed. Yet, his main concerns continued to be centred on the dilemmas of the progressive movement in Kashmir. He understood that the 'progressive' movement was not going to last long in Kashmir. The fateful political contradictions in which it operated were going to slice it up. The progressives in India (and Pakistan) had supported national liberation before 1947 and then got down to the idea of nation building towards socialism. But in Kashmir the movement for liberation had been interrupted.

Soviet communism had proved no solace either. While many Western intellectuals recoiled from communism after Nikita Khrushchev opened the dark files on Stalin's purges (and even more after the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956), oddly, in Kashmir it was Khrushchev who represented the malaise within the Soviet world view. In 1955, at Nehru's behest, Khrushchev came to Kashmir along with his premier Nikolai Bulganin. To a carefully managed crowd loyal to the newly anointed prime minister of Kashmir, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad (one of the conspirators against Sheikh Abdullah), Khrushchev hectoringly declared that not only had Kashmiris already decided to be an 'integral part' of India, but that it was the 'imperialist forces' who wanted to separate Kashmir from India.[12]

This left progressive writers like Mohiuddin confused. Wasn't India the imperial power in Kashmir, some wondered. And, when exactly had Kashmiris decided to be part of India? Terminating any further possibility of communist activism in Kashmir, Khrushchev also issued a barely concealed threat to its people. At the end of a traditional boat ride on the Jhelum, he assured a tiny gathering of Kashmiri collaborators led by Bakshi that if anyone dared to use force to separate Kashmir from India, they would have to face the Soviets. To

his Indian hosts, Khrushchev said: 'We are so near that if ever you call us from the mountain tops we will appear at your side.'[13]

7

As the moment of optimism between the end of the Dogra monarchy and the colonization of Kashmir vanished, Mohiuddin began to reinvent his language and craft. Mohiuddin's writing career in Kashmiri started in 1955 and lasted till the mid-1990s. Not all his works are truly accomplished pieces. Quite a few of his writings – some of which have been published over the last decade – appear to be fragments of something larger or works in progress, but to which Mohiuddin hadn't been able to return. Some appear a bit contrived, or, at best, unsuccessful efforts at experimentations in style. In these unpolished texts, his writing is understandably raw.

Then there are times when Mohiuddin grinds himself down, attempting to depict the culture 'as it is'. This leads him sometimes to typecast certain voices in his stories: Kashmiri women regularly harangue, the men often appear browbeaten and the socially marginalized Sheikh community are presented as given to petty fights or trading vulgar epithets over trivial issues. His story 'Bickering' is an example of this typecasting of voices, even though the story is primarily about a poor Sheikh couple and the dilemmas created around the traditional Kashmiri lamb-shank dish, Paatchi-Kalheer, a rare delicacy in their home.

The issue of why some of these writings turned out to be underdeveloped, in my view, seems not to be the choice of subjects and obviously not the lack of talent, but perhaps the novelty of the genre as well as the unprecedented political choice Mohiuddin made in his writings. Mohiuddin was among the first to write in a form (short story) whose texture and possibilities in Kashmir were only beginning to be explored. He was also writing in a language that had to be invented anew as a vehicle for modern literature.

More importantly, while Mohiuddin had figured the nature of social relations quite perceptively, he sought, despite the occasional typecasting, to recover the voice of the subaltern within a literary tradition from which such

voices had remained expunged. His stories are peopled by everyday Kashmiris: poor and pathetic, social outcasts and misfits, hooligans and harridans. Perhaps this is also why Mohiuddin consistently defied elitist codes and the baggage of politeness in his writing, and why it might have appeared too coarse for so-called shareef ('noble') ears. Yet, this was precisely what set him apart from most other writers in Kashmir.

While Mohiuddin's progressive period saw him write stories like 'The Houris of Paradise', which tell of the power of the feudal lords over Kashmiri peasants – a theme that resonated well with pre-1947 mass politics – the emergent sense of the crushed hopes of Kashmiri liberation sent him in search of meaning, first in the interior world of his subjects, and then in the madness and marginality of that world. Only the mad and marginalized could see the despondency in Kashmir, the artifice of politics, and the horror that lay behind the fabled beauty of Kashmir's landscape.

Political repression had also created a claustrophobia that left Mohiuddin searching for an audience for his voice and, again, only the mad could be trusted. His writings sometimes became cryptic. But not only are these writings a metaphor for their times, a period of repression, they invariably express the sense of suffocation the writer himself felt. For instance, in 'Pondrich', perhaps one of his most famous stories, an indigent peasant, thrown out of his village, roams the streets of Srinagar, asking for alms and eating leaves for food. The superstitious merchants in the city despise the man, but also fear him, for they believe the man possesses mystical powers. However, after he stalks a merchant, the police arrest him and beat him up. Broken, the peasant sees injustice all around him, but every time he opens his mouth to raise his voice, only an incoherent croaking sound comes out, which leads the passers-by to laugh at him.

8

During this era, Mohiuddin's work remained centred on afsana, even though he wrote several popular plays for radio as well. Some of his short stories were, in fact, very short, even just a page in length. What many have called his

novels were, in my view, simply longer stories. Could the nation broken into myriad shards be narrated in novel form yet? The voice of Kashmiris, like all subaltern voices, was broken, their struggles splintered, and no elaborate threads, of nation and nationalism, could perhaps be woven.

Some commentators, like Trilokinath Raina, see Mohiuddin's consequent explorations of the interior world of his characters as a sign that he was a 'mentalist' who had withdrawn from political engagement. Yet Mohiuddin, despite the disappointments of 1947, hadn't retreated from understanding and re-suturing the political. For him, the political was not the world out there – an exteriority of the kind with which the devious statist politics had overwhelmed people. It was the fragile realm of contestations running through the veins of Kashmir, in which historically produced senses of Kashmir as a place and as an idea had unwittingly shaped the personal world of his characters. He delved into intimacy of lives, into relations between characters and even into their mad, private thoughts, to raise some of these subtle political questions. And, to rebuild the political, a delicate ethics of interpersonal relations had to be cultivated.

An example of this is presented in the story, 'Does Anyone Have the Strength'. A Muslim man travelling in a bus mistakes a little Hindu boy and his mother, who are sitting close to him, as Muslim. Overcome by an inexplicable guilt for having made such a mistake, the man grows restless. He wants to make sure that he doesn't appear as a 'monster' to the boy. As he slowly rebuilds the boy's confidence, the man seeks to find the threads of 'Kashmiriness' between himself, the boy and the boy's mother. A reader might also ask: Why did the Muslim passenger feel guilty? Why should the man appear monstrous to the boy? After all, it had only been a few years since Kashmiri Muslims overthrew the monarchical yoke, under which it was the Hindus who had a privileged position over the Muslims. Could the Muslim man's feeling of guilt have come from a growing sense of equivalence in the social positions of Muslims and Hindus in Kashmir?

Reading the story, I felt that while Mohiuddin may have somehow transferred his own feelings to his character, he ultimately had an ethical motive in writing it. He knew that the toxic history of Muslim–Pandit

relations in Kashmir had continued to structure the emotions evoked during their mutual encounters. But, difficult as it may have been to leave behind their own history of forced marginalization, he calls on Muslims to remain sensitive to how Pandits might perceive them in the new situation, especially where the old inter-community codes of expected behaviour may no longer hold. To him, 'Kashmiriness' means cultivating a certain tenderness towards the other, especially through lending a gentle helping hand to turn the Pandit disposition towards Muslims from fear or disdain to respect and understanding. Importantly, if the interiority of some of Mohiuddin's characters reflects the inwardness of his era, he explored it to show how some of the political desperation could be resolved at least within oneself, and in everyday situations, by working to suture social relations.

In another short story 'Man, the Strange Animal', Mallah Subhan, an elderly boatman on Dal Lake, is accused of molesting and murdering a young English tourist. The tourist is the daughter of the boatman's old patrons. In the trial that ensues, the accusations are initially readily, almost instinctively, accepted by the Indian judge – which tells of the judge's colonial mistrust of the native. For want of evidence, however, the charges are finally dropped, but in the meantime Mallah Subhan undergoes personal trauma and his moral universe is riven.

As it emerges, Mallah Subhan also suffers from a poisonous secret he carries inside him, which is connected to the case. He can't share it in the court, for he thinks no one will believe him. Mallah Subhan, it turns out, had a son who died. The son, a soldier in the British army, had deserted as he realized the pointlessness of war. Upon his return to Kashmir, however, he lost his mind, and fell in love with 'dew drops on lotus leaves'. Then, one winter, he gave up his life by jumping into the frigid lake where his body became entangled in the lotuses. Before dying, the son had tormented his father with all kinds of questions, which Mallah Subhan believes only the mad in Kashmir could ask.

The young English woman who comes to live on the boat is a nature lover, but lost in search of the 'meaning of beauty'. She finds her answer when Mallah Subhan tells her about his dead son and his mad words: 'Setting free

my soul, losing my life in beauty, is also a life.' 'I too will find that life,' she says as she plunges to her death from a peak overlooking the lake. Grieving for his patrons' daughter, Mallah Subhan is himself torn by suicidal thoughts. If you are bestowed Paradise, he thinks, pain cannot be far behind. Pain comes from the necessary tragedy that is beauty. Some have the urge to appropriate it as their property and they take it from those who nurture it and give everything they have to it. To live amid the beauty of Kashmir, says Mallah Subhan, has been made impossible. Will only his death liberate him from the pain of this tragic knowledge?

The story, reminiscent of others about the sexual anxieties of colonial officials, is about the futility of war and inner moral conflicts as much as it is about the meaning of beauty. Yet, to me, it also voices a desperate desire to find someone with whom Mallah Subhan could share his seemingly absurd inner thoughts. As everyday life in Kashmir becomes fraught with political tensions and social mistrust, for a mourning boatman on the lake, a Western tourist, unmoored from her actual life world and eager to lend an ear, even though beset by a wide gulf of language, represents a certain madness. His son who had fought in the West had been afflicted by this madness too – as if by some sudden illumination, a new openness to the world. The poisonous knowledge that Mallah Subhan inherits from his mad son can only be passed on to the mad young woman.

'Beauty' is not just a feature of Kashmir's landscape in Mohiuddin's work, but a power that has the potential to foster goodness and tranquility among those who live there. In story after story, he sees Kashmir as a land of beauty and honesty, which is trapped under Indian hegemony. By contrast, the West in his imagination is an unformed space about which nothing can be said for certain, except that it is marked by war and a destructive impulse. (Remember it was an era after World War II and the only place he visited in the West was Moscow, a trip he seems to have written nothing about.) If the notion of an unmoored Western visitor offered him a space to be inhabited by an intimate alter ego, through whom the protagonists could share their innermost and mad thoughts with the readers, the notion of the West as a place of war and

destruction appears to be a sort of thought experiment, of what Kashmir could face if its beauty became an object to be appropriated.

In this sense, Kashmir needed to tread a different path. In 'The Soldier' – a story Mohiuddin wrote and then translated into English himself – a deserter from the British army returns to his village in Kashmir. Once home, he turns from being a 'soldier of war and death' into one of 'life and prosperity'. Watching with anguish his fellow villagers' interest in hearing about his exploits as a soldier, the man recites the famous words of Sheikh Nooruddin, foremost among the Kashmiri Rishis (traditional mystics): 'I broke my sword, and from its iron forged sickles.' After much struggle with himself, these words bring him an inner peace and he becomes reconciled to his decision to desert the army.

9

By the mid-1970s and the early 1980s, as the long-term effects of the land redistribution became visible – including a growing Muslim middle class in Kashmir – its social ramifications didn't miss Mohiuddin's attention. To be sure, none of his writings express nostalgia for the old. Even though the process of Indian occupation had suspended political freedoms in the present and turned Kashmir into a colonial-style dependency, he knew that the past had been unpleasant and repressive too. Yet, some of his stories describe new forms of exploitation that had begun to appear. In his writings from this period, the only nostalgia that appears is for the initial euphoria around peasant emancipation and debt relief. Under these new circumstances, Mohiuddin calls for an empathic understanding between the city and the countryside, which the new cash economy had begun to tear apart.

In 'Remnants of a Lifetime', for instance, a despairing old man offers Mohiuddin a red apple from his orchard. The old man can't have it himself for, he says, he is afflicted by diabetes. The old man mumbles that his condition is a curse for his past deceitfulness. Gradually, he confesses that he had wheedled the land from his dying neighbour in the village. As a young man, he had come to Srinagar and learnt the ways of the city. He became interested in a

tract of land in the village and tried to persuade its owner to sell it. Familiar with cash, markets and bureaucracy, he told the poor peasant that they could open a profitable store in the market with the money from the sale. But the peasant refused, for he had kept the land for his adopted son to farm. Through bureaucratic trickery, however, the narrator eventually got the land in his own name. The dying villager's protests weren't heard and he turned mad just before his death. But before dying, he cursed the land: 'May the land produce in abundance and may the diseases grow aplenty too.' The newly urban narrator then turned the land, in which paddy was grown, into an apple orchard, whose produce was sent to markets abroad. But as he became affluent enough to marry twice, his wealth became a source of legal disputes in his own house. He lost his health and the respect of his children, bringing him to a state of despair.

As a moralistic tale, 'Remnants of a Lifetime' describes the socio-economic changes wrought by the new cash economy and how it disastrously affected family relations. Where it was possible to be loyal *even* to adopted children when there was no greed, with the new cash economy even one's 'real' children couldn't stay loyal. As a symbol of the new cash economy, the apple becomes a poison for Kashmiris. Their condition is worsened by the new slothful but tense market life, which replaced the hardy life of the land, which would tax the peasant physically but keep him content and fit. Under the combined weight of the market and the legal bureaucracy, the world of the peasant stood little chance.

Not all changes were bad though. The new socio-economic realities had also allowed long-buried voices to be heard for the first time and these voices form a new background to some of Mohiuddin's stories. Those social and personal etiquettes that had functioned as restrictive tools, if not completely repressive ones, were beginning to come apart. In one of Mohiuddin's most memorable stories, 'The Red Silken Trousers', several such customary etiquettes are questioned in a new affirmation of life. Khotan, an old woman, has lost all but two of her ten children. In her unending grief, she is caught in the compulsive habit of rearranging their clothes. One day, looking closely, she finds her bridal trousers buried beneath her dead children's clothes. For a

moment, she forgets her children and admires the silken trousers. Her husband Nabir catches a glimpse of Khotan's smile. A surge of passion engulfs the two. But their son-in-law enters as soon as Khotan and Nabir engage in amorous play. While Khotan pretends she is mortified, Nabir remains undaunted.

The story questions the prevalent codes of mourning and passion among Kashmiris, especially the outward expressions of grief expected from women, whose personhood becomes effaced in the service of the household. Could an old woman break the cycle of her mourning through a moment of forgetfulness, especially one induced by an unexpected memory of bodily passions? Could such passions even remain embodied in frail bodies?

Yet again, the interpersonal relations within homes are not immune to the world of impersonal forces outside, even for a wife and a husband as intimate as Khotan and Nabir. Along the way, for instance, the story also alludes to the exploitative and gendered division of labour in Kashmiri economy, where domestic relations have become interlocked with market logic. The old couple is part of the globally famed, but locally obscured shawl industry. While Nabir, as a man, weaves interesting patterns and is well regarded for his craft, Khotan, as a woman, spins the yarn monotonously and her labour remains hidden. But Khotan, as a sign of the new times, does not hide her resentment for the dreary and dull part of the labour she is forced to do.

10

Mohiuddin's stories that deal directly with the Indian occupation of Kashmir came mostly towards the end of his writing career. There were several, however, which saw the violence and political intrigue associated with the occupation quite early.

Most famously, the story 'My Lips Are Sealed' is centred on the emergent political themes of the mid-1950s and was written when India had largely consolidated its control over Kashmir with the help of local collaborators. The story is about Qadir, a rowdy city hustler, who works alongside Indian paramilitary forces, picks fights and causes trouble. One day, the narrator witnesses Qadir pick a fight and beat up an innocent passer-by in a crowded

Srinagar street, and as soon as people assemble to intervene, Indian paramilitary forces dressed as Kashmiri policemen ruthlessly cane-charge the crowd. The next morning's newspapers surprise the narrator. Uniformly, all newspapers report that a 'savage mob of Kashmiris' had pounced upon and beaten Qadir, a 'respectable citizen', and it was only through the 'timely intervention' of the Indian-trained police that a 'ghastly lynching' was prevented. The narrator decides to make inquiries and find the hustler's home. After a long search, he locates it in a dingy part of the city. It turns out that Qadir is a broken man with no job and a huge family to feed. It is, in fact, the local pro-India politicians who consolidate their power by blackmailing him to do their bidding, in return for keeping an accidental death that Qadir had caused under wraps.

'My Lips Are Sealed' is Mohiuddin's best story on the subject of collaboration. In it, not only is Mohiuddin able to uncover how unethical local quislings remain key to Indian rule in Kashmir, but also makes clear that the only way to rebuild trust among the subalterns is to understand how the grey zone of collaboration works at the personal and micro-political levels.

A similar theme is explored in 'Election – The Kashmiri Style'. Two rival pro-India political parties are getting ready for the local elections. Two major Srinagar families, who have built their fortune on government contracts, control the parties. On the eve of the elections, they set the same crowd of gullible Kashmiris upon their rivals. While people are confused about who is who, the families distribute profitable contracts for clearing forests between each other.

That elections were a farcical aspect of Kashmiri political life was widely known. In election after election, the voters were cheated, Indian loyalists elected unopposed, their challengers disqualified and even assaulted for daring to challenge them and polls brazenly rigged. For the few in Kashmir who joined this system, the only lure was acquiring patronage from New Delhi, which in economic terms translated into profitable contracts and a capture of funds ostensibly meant for public works. The story remains an apt parable for present-day electoral politics in Kashmir. Not much has changed.

In the period that started in 1990, Mohiuddin's writings became shorter, but sharper. After four decades of non-violent struggle for self-determination, a new generation of Kashmiri revolutionaries sought independence from India through an armed struggle. Immediately popular across Kashmir, the armed struggle was, however, largely crushed. The Indian government sent tens of thousands of soldiers into Kashmir to suppress the movement, and toughened the martial laws, taking away even the vestiges of basic rights from Kashmiris. Many Kashmiri writers, especially those who had over the years sought state patronage, grew quiet, or refused to speak out against state violence.

Mohiuddin was among the few who expressed their anger. He gave vent to it first in the letters he wrote to the Indian government. In 1984, when Kashmiri nationalists were arrested and tortured for speaking against the state, Mohiuddin wrote publicly against India's hanging of Maqbool Bhat, the leader of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front. Later, he returned the Padma Shri that the Indian government had given him in 1968. Briefly, he even joined the Hurriyat Conference, the political amalgam of pro-freedom groups in Kashmir that came into being in 1993.

But more than these political and symbolic acts, Mohiuddin penned some memorable short stories that tell of the military occupation and how it affects everyday life in Kashmir. 'Jalli's Broken Teeth', is about a form of violence, which leaves the narrator struggling with his own language. Jalli's father is proud of his educated daughter, but devastated as he picks her broken teeth one by one from the bloodied soil.

Not only do Mohiuddin's stories reveal the impact of militarization on life in Kashmir, they also show how violence has become routine and internalized. In 'Terrorist', a truant little boy Shafeeq is walking down the street with his exasperated mother when a patrol party of Indian soldiers comes along. The boy starts crying when he sees the soldiers. The officer leading the party stops, and thinking the boy is scared of the soldiers, tries to reassure Shafeeq: 'Don't be afraid son, daro nahin.' The mother pulls Shafeeq by the ear and replies in a comical mix of Kashmiri and Hindi: '*Aweh, daraan chui yi phata waangun! Dapta hai gun dedo – military ko dekho – dapta hai gun dedo,*' (Afraid who, this little rascal? He says, 'Give me the gun.' He sees military, he wants the gun!)

Taken aback, the officer leaves hurriedly, muttering '*Aatankwadi, sala!*' (Terrorist bastard).

In 'The New Ailment', the narrator tells his audience about an afflicted man who spends hours standing outside the main door of his home, but always leaves without entering. Finally, his family takes him to see a psychiatrist who recommends that the man be frisked every time he stands in front of the door. The family follows this advice and as soon as they frisk him, the man enters his home. The psychiatrist, who gets many such cases, explains that because Kashmiris have been subject to frisking at every checkpoint, many have become 'addicted to getting frisked'. 'Some,' he says, 'even frisk themselves!'

11

In his search for what it meant to be Kashmiri in his time, Mohiuddin developed an abiding interest in the past. I came across his work on history only recently and, in a way, independently of my parents. In some respects, this historical work puts all his previous literary work in a new light and confirms his position as a voice of those vanquished by history.

History seems to have become an active area of interest for Mohiuddin after he moved to Lal Bazaar, the north-western suburb of Srinagar. According to his son Azhar Hilal, while building a new house there, Mohiuddin would carefully watch workers coming across tiny archaeological artefacts. He would then clean them up and preserve them for analysis. These artefacts were from all over the city, where urban expansion was happening seemingly haphazardly, but was in fact shaped deeply by the spatial logic of the military occupation.

Kashmir had old literary and historiographical traditions, but several centuries of foreign rule had disinherited Kashmiris of these traditions. On the other hand, Brahmanical narratives of Kashmir's past had intransigently solidified as historical truths what were essentially classical myths. The Dogra state enthusiastically authorized these narratives and British colonial officials who dabbled in history and philology on the side lent them further credibility. Post-1947, these narratives came in handy for the Indian establishment in

Kashmir, which sought to homogenize Kashmir's past with the overall Hindu nationalist history and appropriate the territory as part of the sacred Hindu geography. To maintain these myths, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), an old colonial-era institution, was now put to serve Indian nationalist interests in Kashmir. In survey after survey, the ASI focused on locating pre-Islamic Hindu artefacts in Kashmir, taking as its guide texts such as the epic Mahabharata.

It was against an institutional hostility towards any alternative narratives of Kashmir's history that Mohiuddin decided to write his *A Fresh Approach to the History of Kashmir*. It was a monograph written in English that sought to reinterpret and revise Kashmir's history. In size, the text is not a monumental one, only a small foot in the door, but sure to upset the traditional gatekeepers of Kashmiri historiography. Keen to marshal evidence from recent advances in the study of Kashmiri language and archaeology, Mohiuddin took playful potshots at Brahmanical narratives.

Fundamental among these narratives was Kashmir's 'origin story', which Mohiuddin sought to revisit. He understood well that origin stories are tales that the dominant tell the dominated. Taken to their logical extremes, these stories could be exclusionary and in many cases violent. That is why he maintained that his account was meant to open a conversation on facts and possibilities rather than becoming a premature assertion of objectivity.

The Brahmanical origin story of Kashmir went something like this:

First, there was a lake called Satisar. Sangraha, the chief of the daityas (opponents of Aryan gods), saw the Aryan god Indra cavort with his wife Sachi on the banks of the lake. In a fit of passion for Sachi, Sangraha released his semen into the lake. From this semen was born an evil demon Jalodbhava (literally, 'the water-born'), whom the snake-worshipping community of Nagas raised. Jalodbhava did penance and earned immortality from an Aryan god, but soon began to devour humans (the children of Manu, who inhabited its four varnas) who lived on the banks of the lake. A conference of the Aryan gods, which the itinerant sage Kashyapa had called, decided to kill the demon. The Naga chief Nila was taken into confidence. Afraid of the Aryan gods, but confident of his immortality, Jalodbhava jumped into the lake and remained

hidden beneath water. Kashyapa ordered the Himalayas around the lake to be broken with a plough. As the water poured out, and Jalodbhava came into view, the Aryan god Hari fought Jalodbhava and cut off his head. As a penalty for raising Jalodbhava, Kashyapa ordered Nila's Nagas to live among the Pishachas (the cruel, lowly race of meat-eating half-humans) for a fourfold epoch (or chaturyuga), after which they could live among the Aryans. Kashyapa assured everyone that the Pishachas would always remain weak and dominated. The dried lake bed became Kashmir, after Kashyap-Mira.[14]

The perceptive reader will note the classic justifications of the caste order, its associated notions of purity and impurity and the sexual anxieties of the Brahmin overlords. Many might even wonder why Jalodbhava's immortality came to nothing but will not be surprised that it is the Aryan gods who hold the final cards. This is, however, no ordinary story of good versus evil. It sets forth a complex narrative matrix upon which contemporary politics in and on Kashmir remains bitterly divided. Before Mohiuddin, the tale had never been challenged. Even in the present, Indian nationalism is so powerfully invested in maintaining the Kashyapa story that contemporary historians have tended not to disturb it. Even those who claim to be secular remain beholden to this origin story and read any attempt to question it as a sign of 'Muslim communalism' or even, strangely, falling into the evils of 'objectivism'. Ideologically comfortable with the neat portrayal of Kashmiri history as divided between a millennia-old 'Hindu golden age' (with occasional instances of conflicts) and the relatively recent but conflictual 'Muslim period' (with occasional instances of tolerance), Indian nationalist historians have not countenanced any challenge to this historiography.

For Mohiuddin, there was no clear reason to believe that the origin story was 'the truth' and, especially, no reason not to speculate on other possible stories, which, if nothing, could at least pluralize the Kashmiri narrative tradition. But instead of simply attacking Brahmins for sacralizing myths, which he rightly thought was no crime, Mohiuddin took on the British colonial amateur historians who had relied overly on Sanskrit texts to turn myths into history. Prominent among these was Aurel Stein, a Hungarian-British Indologist and translator of the *Rajatarangini*, which was a kavya or

long Sanskrit poem written by Kalhana in the twelfth century. *Rajatarangini,* or 'River of Kings', presented a chronology of kingly events in Kashmir and an imaginative account of Kashmiri geography. Parts of the poem, most importantly the origin story, were drawn from an eighth-century Sanskrit text called *Nilamata Purana,* which falls into the genre of Brahmin oral and textual tradition that records the legends of gods and goddesses, among other things.

Aurel Stein was not interested in simply translating a classic text, Mohiuddin realized. He had set out to unearth the cultural world to which Kalhana had belonged and, which, Stein thought, had become subsequently polluted. To do this, Stein took the twelfth-century place names from the *Rajatarangini* to locate their correlates in twentieth-century Kashmir. In doing this, Stein had almost prefigured to a letter the ASI's programme in Kashmir half a century later, only this time ASI's archaeo-nationalists were armed with a different epic, the Mahabharata. What surprised Mohiuddin was that Stein had always been able to definitively locate the place names found in *Rajatarangini*, albeit in a 'corrupted' form. It was as if Kashmir's history in the aftermath of classical Sanskrit times had just been a long period of stasis or cultural degeneration; as if nothing had moved fundamentally, everything had just collected dust.

For Stein, thus, scholarly work had involved separating what was pure Sanskrit from what was corrupted, that is, ordinary Kashmiri. Kashmiri Muslims, in Stein's scheme, were sitting atop a vast Sanskrit culture, which had to be recovered and its primacy re-established. *Rajatarangini* was to be the guiding map. This was sweet music to the Dogra maharaja's ears, who was keen to consolidate his reputation as a Hindu king ruling over a sacred Hindu domain – even though more than three quarters of his subjects were Muslim.

While Mohiuddin saw Stein's entire approach as flawed, he took issue with his shoddy methods. Stein had been quite casual in his research, going to Kashmiri villagers and asking questions to which the latter would have no way of providing valid answers. With generous help from his Brahmin informants, Stein mostly asked about place names and then twisted his findings enough to make what he had heard sound like names he had read in the *Rajatarangini*. Here is what Mohiuddin had to say:

> We Kashmiris are generally intelligent conversationalists … But when it comes to spinning yarn, God bless us! I wonder how it happened that Sir Aurel Stein always got the right answers to his queries, or was it that his subordinates prompted the interviewees to say exactly what was palatable to their Bod sahib (the big colonial boss)?[15]

The Brahmins had found in their 'Bod sahib' not only a sympathetic listener, but one who went beyond their interest in maintaining a myth to becoming a zealous defender of the mythic origin story as the historical truth. In Mohiuddin's view, Stein had done a service to Kashmir by making the *Rajatarangini* available to a much larger audience, but at the same time he had done it a disservice by contributing to turning a mythical story, which was part of Kashmir's cultural repertoire, into an ideological project.

To present his alternative origin story, Mohiuddin sought inspiration from two major sources. First, he keenly read Grierson's *A Dictionary of Kashmiri Language*.[16] Upturning conventional wisdom that Sanskrit was the mother language, Grierson had argued that Kashmiri had more likely emerged from an older group of subcontinental languages closely related to Dardic. Second, Mohiuddin had closely followed the latest archaeological discoveries at sites such as Burzahom in Srinagar as well as the analysis of artefacts found in sites in the Indus Valley. These new findings indicated that the Indus Valley Civilization, which preceded the Aryan invasions into the subcontinent in 1500 BC by about two millennia, had probably extended into Kashmir. Mohiuddin himself went around archaeological sites in Srinagar to collect terracotta figurines and pottery shards and interpreted his findings with remarkable sophistication to support his new arguments. All of this was enough grist for Mohiuddin to speculate on an alternative origin story.

To begin with, Mohiuddin argued that there was a much vaster culture that lay buried underneath the so-called 'Sanskritic culture' itself and the remnants of this had survived in the Kashmiri cultural unconscious. There may have been a vast lake, he wrote, but the demon story was just a latter-day myth woven around what was essentially an invasion of Kashmir and the domination of its natives. Mohiuddin also pointed out that Nagas (snake-worshippers) and Pishachas (the so-called meat-eating low castes), described in Sanskrit texts as two distinct groups, were, in fact, one people. 'Nagas' and 'Pishachas' described

only their religious and cultural (their meat-eating) practices, respectively. These people, Mohiuddin wrote, spoke a language close to Dardic, which itself may have been part of a language from which Dravidian languages emerged. Mohiuddin was confident that the people of the ancient urban civilization of the Indus Valley spoke something close to Dravidian. The nomadic Aryans, who invaded from the north-west around 1500 BC and soon destroyed the Indus Valley Civilization's urban centres, took a few centuries to cross the mountains into Kashmir. By this time, Mohiuddin argued, the Aryans had lost some of their early aggression, even though it had not prevented them from relegating the natives of Kashmir to the position of subhumans, who could not speak a proper language and were fit only for annihilation.

After this early period of domination, Mohiuddin wrote, the popular turn to Buddhism in Kashmir around 300 BC was a subaltern rebellion against Brahmanical caste order. The subaltern cause was helped by the conversion to Buddhism of the Mauryas, the dynasty that ruled Kashmir around that time, and of which Ashoka was the most powerful proponent. Buddhist preachers spread their religion through stories and parables narrated in non-Sanskrit languages. According to Mohiuddin, fragments of some of these stories are still in cultural use in Kashmir, even though their origins have been forgotten. He gives the example of 'svod bror' and 'bodh bror', two cats who appear in Kashmiri folk tales as wise sages, often sitting under a tree (Kashmiri: kulis tal*),* and who resolve crucial ethical dilemmas that arise in these tales. The two cats, in Mohiuddin's view, are actually one: svod is Siddhartha and bodh is Buddha, two names of Lord Buddha, who is often pictorially represented as meditating under a tree.

Brahminism returned in full force around 600 AD when Brahmins from south India, who arrived in Kashmir from the Konkan region, made common cause with the ossified Buddhist clergy in Kashmir. But even then, the pre-Aryan cultural practices continued to exist, Mohiuddin argues. The respect for serpents, and the practice of putting cups of milk in front of snakes, continues even to the present, he says. In his view, while the revival of Brahminism, which lasted six centuries, produced great cultural achievements, including the spiritual wisdom of tantra*,* the return of the oppressive caste system created the

perfect opportunity for a new faith to make its way into Kashmir. Like Buddhism had earlier, Islam answered this need.

In Mohiuddin's alternative account, then, the driving force of Kashmiri history has always been a lengthy interplay of forces between the subaltern reaction to Brahminism and its revival. This history could be traced all the way back to the entry of the Aryans into Kashmir. Like the Brahmin–Stein origin tale, Mohiuddin's *Fresh Approach* may just be another story, but it is clearly a more plausible one. His arguments begin to explain how Kashmir had swung from one religion to another and how there are historical resources that Kashmiris must make available to themselves to build a plural, accommodative cultural foundation for their politics of liberation. Finished in 1995, the *Fresh Approach* was the final attempt on Mohiuddin's part to answer what it means to be a Kashmiri in the present. He died in 2001.

12

The writing life of Mohiuddin covers a period in Kashmir, 1955 to 1994, about which no 'history from below' has been written. Traditionally, the history writing of this period is centred on the political biographies of the Kashmiri and the Indian political elites, and, occasionally, how their machinations have led to the present political impasse in Kashmir. While writings in this mode have held rewards for the writers, as they work close to the centres of power, there is also an ideological imperative involved. Since 1947, when Indian forces came into Kashmir and refused to leave, India's relationship with Kashmir has come to be putatively described through the prism of Indian 'secularism'. The political as well as the emotional transactions between the Nehru-Gandhi family in India and the Abdullahs in Kashmir have been the dominant metaphor for the India–Kashmir relationship. If certain post-colonial theorists argue that Indian secularism was always an elitist project, a preoccupation with Nehru–Abdullah (and by extension India–Kashmir) relations among Indian nationalist historians provides ample evidence to support that argument.

Reading Mohiuddin, one cannot but admire him for his courage. He took on everything past and present in Kashmir and turned it upside down. Having quietly entered and left the state-curated museum of literature and history in Kashmir, for fifty years he worked like a termite to show how hollow its edifices were. In doing so, Mohiuddin was going against the grain of all conventional wisdom, and the practical advice of his literary colleagues. Some of his friends had a good measure of the intolerance of the Indian state, which often took recourse to cheap forms of intimidation. Mohiuddin himself wasn't unaware of it. In 1993, while presenting a section of his *Fresh Approach,* a man in the audience, known to be close to the establishment, got up and physically assaulted Mohiuddin. The audience saved Mohiuddin, then an old man, but the incident shook him. Mohiuddin forgave his assaulter unconditionally, perhaps remembering the quandaries of his own character Qadir in 'My Lips are Sealed'. Fierce with his pen, he remained remarkably composed throughout his life, his personal outrage reserved only for those who kowtowed to what was deemed 'appropriate literature' by the Indian establishment.

For half a century, Mohiuddin carried in his writings the burden of a people denied the dignity of existence. Each year of his fifty-year career, he wrote a short story. Some were full of barely suppressed anger; some tested, with his measured calm, the patience of his outraged audience. All provoked his readers to ask new questions and push the boundaries of imagination. He was parsimonious, often furtive – a guerrilla writer – blending and defying conventions of genre. But in illuminating the veiled recesses of Kashmiri social relations, his writings shone with an acute literary sensibility.

Throughout his life, Mohiuddin worked, with a remarkable strength of will, beneath the shadows deliberately produced around him. He did so with the single-minded purpose of liberating the Kashmiri collective consciousness from the guilt and self-doubt that centuries of foreign domination had cultivated. As the quintessential literary interpreter of the ordeals of Kashmiris, Mohiuddin remains, in my view, singular in his restless search for an ethical ideal to ground dilemmas of existence in Kashmir. This ethical ideal transected a sense of Kashmir as a place enlivened with meaning and memory, an obligation to dwell light-footed in it, and the practice of non-conformity to

power as Kashmir's historical legacy. As such, he remains the most articulate voice of azadi.

Dr Mohamad Junaid has contributed essays on Kashmir in several edited volumes, including *Everyday Occupations: Experiencing Militarism in South Asia and the Middle East* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); *Resisting Occupation in Kashmir* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018); *Until My Freedom Has Come: The New Intifada in Kashmir* (Haymarket Books, 2012); *Of Occupation and Resistance* (Tranquebar, 2013); *The Hanging of Afzal Guru* (Penguin, 2013). His essays have also appeared in *Economic and Political Weekly, Greater Kashmir, Tanqeed,* Al-Jazeera, Turkish Radio and Television, *Tehelka*, and *Guernica*. He teaches anthropology at the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts.

NOTES

1 Most of Akhtar Mohiuddin's writings that I include in this essay are from two of his short story collections, *Wanun Ma Banyim te Baqi Afsaneh* (Kashmiri), Srinagar: Book Bank, 2009 and *Seven One Nine Seven One and Other Short Stories,* Srinagar: Book Bank, 2009. I also draw significantly from his book, *A Fresh Approach to the History of Kashmir,* Srinagar: Book Bank, 1998.

2 Raina, Trilokinath, *A History of Kashmiri Literature*, New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2002.

3 Ghulam Nabi Khayal, 'Akhtar Mohiuddin', Foreword to *Seven One Nine Seven One.*

4 For further discussion on this historical aspect of Kashmir conflict see Bashir, Khalid, *Kashmir: Exposing the Myth Behind the Narrative*, Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publication, 2016 [editors].

5 Ibid.

6 See Kak, Sanjay, 'Stand Up and Be Counted', in Deepak Mehta and Rahul Roy (eds), *Violence and the Quest for Justice in South Asia*, New Delhi: Sage Publications India, 2018 [editors].

7 For background, see Rai, Mridu, 'The Indian Constituent Assembly and the Making of Hindus and Muslims in Jammu and Kashmir', *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 49, No. 2, 2018, pp. 205–21 [editors]. For an in-depth discussion of

the Hindutva movement and its relationship with Indian nationalism, see Jaffrelot, Christophe, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India,* New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.

8 For further discussion on Indian territoriality and its symbolic representation as Bharat Mata, see Ramaswamy, Sumathi, *The Goddesses and the Nation: Mapping Mother India,* Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.

9 For an exhaustive discussion of the progressive writers and their works, see Khayal, Ghulam Nabi, *Progressive Literary Movement in Kashmir*, Srinagar: Khayalaat Publishers, 2011.

10 For discussion, see Lamb, Alistair, *Kashmir: A Disputed Legacy 1846 – 1990*, Hertfordshire: Roxford Books, 1991, pp. 158–81.

11 See, 'The Antiquity of Kashmiri Language', in Mohiuddin Akhtar, *A Fresh Approach to the History of Kashmir*, Srinagar: Book Bank, 1998.

12 See 'Khrushchev Says Pakistan Tried to Bar Kashmir Trip', *The New York Times,* 11 December 1955.

13 See Tillin, Louise, 'India and Russia's Common Past', in BBC, 4 December 2002. Also mentioned in Lancaster, Carol, *Foreign Aid: Diplomacy, Development, Domestic Politics,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007, p. 66.

14 A close version of this story was first narrated in Stein, Aurel, *Kalhana's Rajatarangini: A Chronicle of the Kings of Kasmir,* Westminster: Archibald Constable and Company, 1900.

15 *A Fresh Approach,* p. 26.

16 Grierson, George Abraham, *A Dictionary of the Kashmiri Language*, Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1932.

9

A Childhood to Insurgency

Shahnaz Bashir

I was six when Javed Miandad hit that historic six in that last, long, pensive moment at Sharjah in 1986. Pakistan needed four runs from one ball to win the game against India. Since I was a kid, I had no idea about Kashmiris' special emotion behind cricket. I was as unaware and confused about everything that had been going on in Kashmir, and between India and Pakistan, just as many young children in Kashmir must be today. People – kids, youths and elders – from our old mohalla and shopkeepers of Natipora, the place where I lived, would gather in front of our large black-and-white Weston TV and sit for the match, for both the innings, solemnly glued to the screen. After they left, my mother had to collect bits of eggshell or groundnut shells from the floor. Such was the sentiment for Pakistan that my aunt once placed a silk-cased Quran on the television set. As a gesture, it was meant to bless Pakistan to beat India in a One-Day International. That was when I began to grow curious about why Indo-Pak cricket held such a special place in the emotions of Kashmiris.

The first time I saw bunkers being built at the bridge named after Mehjoor, one of the greatest modern Kashmiri poets, my priorities began to change. *Daata* was the last film I watched with my father at Regal Cinema before bomb blasts in Srinagar began shutting the theatres down. I was eight or nine. I was a great Mithun Chakraborty fan.[1] *Pyar Jhukta Nahin*, *Ilaaka*, *and Elaan* – amongst other movie hits from Mithun – struck the big screen in those years. I

was perennially angry with the local barber for his failure to set my hair like Mithun's. Only later would I realize that the nature of my own hair prevented it happening. As the situation began to worsen in Kashmir, Mithun began to fade from my mind. The most recurring photograph published in the Urdu newspapers of Srinagar of uniformed Azam Inqilabi, a Kalashnikov in either hand, settled in my imagination.[2] Inqilabi issued a powerful message that called upon the youth to join a liberation movement. I too wanted to have a gun and fight like him.

Interestingly, for years after the cinema closed down in Srinagar, life-size posters of *Daata* with Mithun wearing a bullet-studded waistband over his double-pocket black shirt – one gun hanging off his left shoulder – remained plastered on the city walls. Many insurgents, I noticed in the beginning of the 1990s, wore their hair like Mithun. Even their moustaches aped the one from the *Daata* posters. The vengeful posture of Mithun from the movie – both his hands raised and holding two iron rods; the long fringes of his hair draped over his headband – shaped their militant mien.

I had no idea of the politics of my favourite serial *Hazaar Daastaan* (A Thousand Tales) that was telecast on Doordarshan Srinagar. I loved and imitated the character of Ahaid Raaza. I would sit in front of the television hours ahead of the serial and watch all the Itios-socks ads in the interval. For a long time, I knew Nazir Josh only as Ahaid Raaza, even though he played the character of Juma German in a second serial and Raaza Haaenz in another.[3] But decades after *Hazaar Daastaan* was censored by the then National Conference (NC) government, and years after the tapes of the serial were destroyed in a mysterious fire in Doordarshan, I learned from Nazir Josh himself that 'Hazaar Daastaan' was a political satire meant to reflect the corrupt governance of Farooq Abdulla, the then chief minister of Kashmir.

I turned nine in 1989. I began to sense something unusual was happening in the Valley. I couldn't comprehend the politics of the events but I understood that the people of Kashmir were agitated from suffering a serious political injustice. From an early 1989 winter evening when my father read aloud from a local Urdu newspaper, narrating how Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front's Sheikh Abdul Hamid and his companion escaped on a scooter, after attacking

a policeman with a Chinese pistol in downtown Srinagar, to the custodial killing of school principal Rizwan Pandit in March 2019, much has happened in the last thirty years to make one more than a political being in Kashmir.[4] Much had happened before too. From an October day in 1947, when the Indian Army landed in Kashmir, to this day when there are almost half a million troops in Kashmir to control a population of one and a half million people; much has happened.

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History has fascinated me since school. I always wondered why we were only taught Indian history. I wanted to know about Kashmir, particularly about the events that led to the 1989 uprising. Resistance leaders like Syed Ali Geelani talked so much about what was happening in the Kashmir of the 1990s, and spoke very briefly about what had happened before, but they hardly said anything about their own positions. I always wanted somebody to ask Geelani to narrate his experiences as an MLA of the state. Under what circumstances had he sworn allegiance to the Indian Constitution after knowing that Kashmir had been occupied by India in 1947? I wanted somebody to ask Muhammad Aslam how he became Yasin Malik. I wanted Yasin Malik to share his experiences as a polling agent for the Muslim United Front, a polling agent who was beaten to pulp by the workers of the National Conference in the 1987 assembly elections. Such narratives of Kashmiris were unavailable.[5]

I would often read history in my university days. I read and loved literature too. The year I was born, Salman Rushdie published *Midnight's Children*, the novel that surprisingly foresaw and foretold exactly what was going to happen a decade later in Kashmir. In my university years, I was amazed to read on the second page of 'The Perforated Sheet', the first chapter of Rushdie's book, how it would all start in Kashmir, how India would begin consolidating control in the Valley:

> In those days the radio mast had not been built and the temple of Shankaracharya, a little black blister on a khaki hill, still dominated the streets and lake of Srinagar. In those days there was no army camp at the lakeside, no endless snakes of camouflaged trucks and jeeps clogged the narrow mountain roads, no soldiers hid behind the crests of the mountains past Baramulla

> and Gulmarg. In those days travellers were not shot as spies if they took photographs of bridges, and apart from the Englishmen's houseboats on the lake, the Valley had hardly changed since the Mughal Empire, for all its springtime renewals; but my grandfather's eyes – which were, like the rest of him, twenty-five years old – saw things differently … and his nose had started to itch … Many years later, when the hole inside him had been clogged up with hate, and he came to sacrifice himself at the shrine of the black stone god in the temple on the hill, he would try and recall his childhood springs in Paradise, the way it was before travel and tussocks and army tanks messed everything up.[6]

In my teen years, I noticed that every day before he took his afternoon nap, my maternal grandfather read from a thick, torn, jacketless book on Kashmir history that was written in Urdu. I became curious. What was he reading in this book filled with photos in which Sheikh Abdullah either posed with his wife or his entire family, or with Nehru and other Indian statesmen – all those who were then employing every diplomatic, militaristic and political method to annex Kashmir to the Union of India? How to reconcile those pictures with the one in which the tonsured Abdullah sits sadly beside the cot that holds the body of a martyr of the 1931 Central Jail massacre?

One day I found the front cover of the book and finally learnt its title: *Shabistaan: Sheikh Abdullah Dost Ya Dushman?*[7] On the ashlar hamaam[8] of the local mosque, I once watched an old mason fight with a young man over Sheikh Abdullah. The old man reacted sternly in favour of the Sheikh, while the young man believed he had betrayed Kashmiris and allowed the Indian Army to occupy Kashmir. The debate on the Sheikh as good guy or bad continues to this day. During my adolescence, I browsed through some dusty and mote-ridden libraries and explored the untouched, mildewed archives. I marvelled at old facts and photographs. The black-and-white pictures that appeared alongside the text strengthened my picture of the years I had not witnessed myself. I traced the history of the land right from the time when, according to primary, mythological sources like the *Nilamata Purana*, Kashmir was a lake called Satisar – ruled by Pishachas and Nagas – to the early Hindu rule.[9] I moved from the Hindu rule to the Buddhist conquest, to the formation of the Muslim Sultanate, to the invasion of the Mughals, to the advent of the Afghans, to the brutal Sikh rule, to the accession of the Dogras and finally, to the most crucial year, 1947.[10] Before 1989, the years that were turning points

in Kashmiri history were 1947, 1953, 1965 and 1971. Among them, 1965, the year when titles like Wazir-e-A'zam [prime minister] and Sadr-i-Riyasat [president of the state] were changed to those of the other Indian state titles like Wazir-e-A'la [chief minister] and governor; and 1971 was the year when India went to war with Pakistan. The year 1953 was when a new pivotal party Plebiscite Front was floated by some leaders of the NC; the same year, Sheikh Abdullah was dethroned and imprisoned. I noticed that overall, 1947 had been the most important year, for the most important event had taken place then: for the first time ever, the Indian Army had arrived in Kashmir, and the first seeds of military occupation were sown.

THE PHOTOGRAPH[11]

Venue: Palladium Cinema. Maharaja Hari Singh, the last king of Kashmir, has fled to Jammu and the tribal army has already been pushed back. Sheikh Abdullah is the emergency administrator of the state. In front of Kashmir Talkies, Jawaharlal Nehru delivers a speech. A wooden table, on which Nehru stands, has been placed atop a large wooden rostrum. The margins of the rostrum have been draped with namdas (tasselled and embroidered woollen Kashmiri mats). People peek out at the stage from the surrounding buildings, even from the windows of Palladium Cinema itself. Sheikh Abdullah sits in a chair to the right of Nehru, close to him, and listens intently. Nehru's speech seems encouraging to Abdullah, enough to coax him and authorize him as a future leader of Kashmir. There is a life-size portrait of the Sheikh on the top left side of the facade of Palladium Cinema. In the portrait, he rides a black horse and holds the flag of his party in his right hand [Description of a photo from November 1947].

Seven years later, the same Nehru would send Sheikh Abdullah to jail for eleven years, during which time he would mutilate the political anatomy of the state. He would transplant the political organs and install new people on the throne. Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, would be one of them. Nehru would create conditions to confuse the aspiration of Kashmiris for an independent state of Jammu and Kashmir. Those confusions would alter perceptions too. It would be difficult for younger generations of Kashmiris like me to decide

whether they should be supporters of the Pakistani cricket team and paste posters of Imran Khan on the mud walls of their homes, or become Mithun fans and set their hairstyles like him, or dream of a cricket team and cinema of their own. Something like a Kashmir cricket team and a Kashmir film industry with its own players, actors, villains and comedians. But the politically seasoned and shrewd Nehru would twist their political imagination forever. In the many years to follow, new political connections between Kashmir and the plains of India would be established, new political narratives written, mythological relationships appropriated and secularism invoked to blackmail one community to be at odds with another.

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In my perusal of history, I was at the crossroads about the mass migration of Kashmiri Pandits from Kashmir. I was ambivalent about it; on the one hand, I felt that it was good because the people believed that Pandits had always sided with the monarchs of Kashmir and exploited the Muslim artisans and peasantry for generations. The Muslims had been treated as second-class citizens ever since the fourteenth century.[12] On the other hand, I felt that something was seriously wrong.

Many of my teachers had been Kashmiri Pandits. Our neighbourhood buzzed with them. My parents had lived in great harmony with their Pandit neighbours. My most vivid memory is of a night in my childhood when I had to walk barefoot for a kilometre on the main road of Natipora accompanying an uncle, one of my father's best friends, to a Pandit wedding. The late-night banquet was arranged in a marquee pitched in the plum orchard of the host. After dinner, I found that my nylon slippers were missing. I tried looking for them but finally had to go home barefoot. I still remember how safe and easy it had been to walk in the middle of the night along a road that shone so much under the illumination of street lights that I was able to keep my bare feet from falling on the tiniest pebble.

From 1989, it became difficult to come out of home after six in the evening, and I would often miss this night. A decade later, in an ironic

coincidence, the army took me to the same plum orchard for an identification parade in a crackdown. I had grown into a teenager now, and it was my first experience of being part of such a parade. The house where the Pandit wedding had taken place was now a gutted, abandoned structure with a jagged pillar of bricks in the centre.

Shivani Koul had been one of my best friends in school. I still remember her lazy eyes and her silky hair. I remember her Nataraj pencil and sharpener and perfumed, multicoloured, fruit-shaped or animal-shaped erasers. She had been the most helpful and the kindest of all my classmates. Her sudden disappearance in 1989 or 1990, I don't remember the year now, didn't surprise me much. I grew up missing classmates like her, and thinking that the Pandits should not have migrated at all.[13]

My observation of the recent past of Kashmir tells me that 1947 has been the most intriguing of all the landmark years in modern history. It has been the most decisive and, politically, the most distorted too. The years following 1947 foreshadow the future: military incursions, maladministration, curfews, police brutalities, people's demand for a permanent solution to the Kashmir issue, aspirations of freedom or azadi and other forms of solution including accession to Pakistan.[14]

Here I am reminded of a YouTube video.[15] In this black-and-white film clip there are three men, in long coats and karakuls, sitting in front of a journalist whom the voice-over introduces as John Edwards. There is a brick wall behind the men. The man who speaks to John Edwards is none other than Ghulam Mohi-ud-Din Karra of the Opposition Action Committee. The interview begins and a swirl of smoke from Karra's cigarette enters the frame. The video was taken in 1965 and the last clip shows two UN officials surveying the LoC in Jammu and Kashmir for any violations. To many questions regarding Indo–Pak politics and circumstances in Kashmir, Karra responds wittily, saying that India is not sincere in its attempts to resolve the political issue of Kashmir. He likens the Indian policies in Kashmir to those of the French in colonized Algeria. Karra's answer to Edwards's last question (*…will the two sides [India and Pakistan] move back in time from the brink of war?*) is a resounding 'No'.

Karra's understanding was proved right when India and Pakistan went to war in 1971. Fighter planes would whiz over the neighbourhoods of Srinagar, leaving twin trails of smoke in their wake. Years later, in the 1990s, my father would narrate to me how his father, my grandfather, had dug trenches and made underground shelters, like any other Kashmiri, to save our family from stray attacks. And then, after the violent 1990s, there would be yet another unfinished war between India and Pakistan, which happened in 1999. A glut of failed talks would follow. Then an era of forced peace would prevail in the Valley, punctuated by cycles of severe grass-roots protests, which would be suppressed by bouts of state violence. And there, on top of it all, would be the dirty nationalistic politics, waiting for the next war, without end.

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Shahnaz Bashir is the author of the critically lauded and widely reviewed debut novel *The Half Mother* (Hachette, 2014) that won the Muse India Young Writer Award 2015. His second book *Scattered Souls* (HarperCollins, 2016), a collection of interlinked stories, was longlisted for Tata Lit Live Best Book Fiction 2017 and won The Citizen's Talent of the Year Award 2016–2017. He teaches narrative journalism, conflict reporting to postgraduate students at the Central University of Kashmir.

NOTES

1 Mithun Chakraborty was a famous Bollywood superstar in the 1980s and early '90s.

2 Azam Inqilabi was the leader of Mahaz-e-Azadi, a separatist resistance movement. He joined the movement at seventeen and has been arrested and released fifteen times so far.

3 Nazir Josh is a Kashmiri stage and TV actor.

4 Sheikh Abdul Hamid was a young pioneer of Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front. He was killed in an encounter with Indian Army on 18 November 1992.

5 S.A. Geelani has published a three-part memoir in addition to other historical accounts detailing his life and experiences.

6 Rushdie, Salman, 'The perforated sheet', *Midnight's Children*, London: Vintage, Penguin Books, 1991, p. 5.

7 Dehelvi, Younis, and Idrees Illyas (eds), *Shabistaan: Sheikh Abdullah Dost Ya Dushman?* (Sheikh Abdullah: Friend or Foe?), New Delhi: Shama Publications, 1968.

8 Hamaam is a communal bathhouse; this one is particularly made of ashlar stones, which are cuboid.

9 Kumari, Ved, *Nilamata Purana*: *Cultural and Literary Study*, Srinagar and Jammu: Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, 1988.

10 Prem Nath, Bazaz, *The History of Struggle for Freedom in Kashmir: Cultural and Political History (From the Earliest Times to the Present Day)*, Srinagar: Gulshan Publications, 2003.

11 The photo for this section, as the author says, is not to be printed because it has been 'written'. This is after a technique used by Ryszard Kapuscinski in the *Shah of Shahs* [editors].

12 For details on Muslim predicament under Dogra rule, see Abdullah, Sheikh, Mohammad, *Aatish-e-Chinar*, Srinagar: Ali Mohammed & Sons, 1985. Also see, Rai, Mridu, *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects: Islam, Rights and the History of Kashmir*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004, pp. 149–57; see Malik, Iffat, *Kashmir: Ethnic Conflict and International Dispute*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

13 Most of my understanding of Kashmir's history comes from Pandit Prem Nath Bazaz, a Kashmiri Pandit, a great historian and journalist. He impressed me so much that I took him as the topic of my postgraduate dissertation and tried to argue that he was a pioneer in journalism in the Valley. Bazaz had written nearly a dozen books and about two dozen pamphlets on Kashmir history and politics, all arguing in favour of Kashmir's independence from India.

14 See Naqvi, Saeed, 'The Killing Fields of Jammu: How Muslims Became a Minority in the Region', Scroll.in, 10 July 2016; Also see, Snedden, Christopher, *The Untold Story of the People of Azad Kashmir*, Columbia: Hurst Publishers, 2012, pp. 31–151.

15 'Kashmiri opinion on Kashmir conflict in the 1960s', http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZr53wzaQSw (accessed on 7 July

2018).

10

From the Torture Chambers and Back

Narrative: Abdul Qadeer Dar
Written by: Nawaz Gul Qanungo

1

I was eighteen years old in the year 1987. The Muslim United Front (MUF) had been formed and we students supported it. It was an important moment of our lives when I, along with many others like me, entered the world of politics and became involved with what is our legacy: masla-e-Kashmir (the issue of Kashmir).

The MUF consisted of Kashmiris who had decided to fight democratic elections to form the government in a bid to resolve the Kashmir dispute. The ruling establishment rigged the elections. The government at that time targeted many MUF supporters including young students. We were blacklisted and labelled as being anti-democracy. I was just one of the many who became disenchanted with India. We were convinced that India did not want the Kashmir issue to be resolved and that it only wanted to maintain pro-India governments in the region.[1]

I studied history in college but Kashmir did not really exist in what we were taught. It was all about 'Indian' history.[2] Kashmir has always been a disputed territory under Indian occupation. It is not like Delhi, or Punjab; it is

not a part of India. India has occupied it after accession since 1947. This is what I as well as many others in Kashmir thought of the problem. Nothing can change it, certainly not my opinion or what I may or may not say. Initially, Kashmir was fully under the special-status Article 370. We had our own prime minister, and slowly that special status was eroded and in the last thirty years people have even been denied basic human rights. We were promised a plebiscite by India. Jawaharlal Nehru had declared at a rally in Kashmir that we would be given a chance to decide our future, but this promise was never fulfilled.[3] This is why we raised our voices in 1987 through fighting elections. We demanded that Kashmiris be allowed to choose their destiny.

The MUF was supposed to enter the assembly, where it could then represent our position on the Kashmir issue, something that was otherwise being put into cold storage. But the establishment never allowed the MUF to move ahead. We tried what the world respects as a democratic effort and it was made to fail. We were left with little option.

2

We were just a few young men. After all, not a lot of people have a genuine interest in politics. People usually want to take care of their own lives, their businesses and their futures. Those who are genuinely motivated by a political cause are few, but then they manage to lead the masses. Look at India's freedom movement, led by Gandhi. Or consider Nelson Mandela.

When a sword is raised against you, as they say, you can practise faith in three different ways. You can fight the sword with a sword. Or you can fight it with words. If neither of these is possible, you just fight it with your belief. People who belong to the first category are few, but we have them in Kashmir and they are dedicated to the Tehreek-e-azadi (freedom movement), and have little interest in worldly things. These people invested their lives and blood in the movement. Had there been no dispute, there wouldn't have been Tehreek. The movement is because of the dispute. Kashmiris are demanding that India's occupational forces must leave the Kashmiri nation alone, so that they can take care of their lives, their country and their future on their own terms.

3

I was a student in Baramulla Degree College. Many of my friends and I were supporters of the MUF and we were often jailed for it. We were just small fries and not in the big league. Ghulam Mohammed Safvi was the MUF candidate in our constituency. He was just a common man, perhaps in his forties. He was a political activist and a member of the Jamaat-e-Islami, which was one of the parties that formed the larger conglomerate that was the MUF. We supported the MUF because they represented the sentiments of Kashmiris as far as the Kashmir issue was concerned.

The MUF was a strong movement; it was a wave and not something ordinary. People like me who were ordinary students, professionals and traders offered support the MUF during the election campaign. We were not at the centre of the politics, but were active supporters. We used to talk to people and try to convince them to vote for the MUF. We helped in identifying people who could be suitable polling agents. Even for carrying out such trivial jobs in the MUF campaign, the police would nab and harass us. But this was not new. The police had harassed people long before the MUF arose.

I remember we used to demonstrate on 14 August, which is Pakistan's Independence Day. In Kashmir we have a long-standing culture of celebrating Pakistan's Independence Day. The government would always detain us during this time. But we would go into hiding and reappear just in time for the celebrations and demonstrations. We used to unfurl and wave Pakistani flags – there were no Kashmiri flags in those days – we used to celebrate and enjoy. Then, at night, people would observe a blackout and keep the lights turned off throughout the localities and neighbourhoods. I think it was just about a dozen people who would lead these celebrations, not like today when people throng every lane and by-lane. Most active in these events would be activists from the Jamaat-e-Islami, or the Jamiat-e-Talaba (the Islamic Students League). Our events were low-key and benign, and nothing dangerously violent was ever done. We were just a motley group and not even organized, so

to speak. Yet the police would always be after us, and label us 'wanted'. This was around 1985 or 1986.

During this time, the police would try to nab me but had never been successful. But in 1987, they caught me some time before the elections, when we were campaigning for the MUF. That day, a rally was coming from Srinagar. I was near the town, leading a crowd of about 1,000 or perhaps more college students. People like Qazi Nisar, Abbas Ansari, Prof. Abdul Gani Bhat, Ghulam Mohammed Safi, Prof. Ashraf Saraf, and others were coming to speak at the Baramulla Eidgah. I'm not sure if all of them were present. The formation of the MUF had just been announced. It was the summer of 1987.

But before the rally could arrive at Baramulla, I was arrested. Dataji Ganjoo used to be the Superintendent of Police in Baramulla in those days. He was the one who jailed me. There was one more student named Showkat Ahmed who was arrested. Our rally was lathi-charged and dispersed. Later, we came to know that the rally had arrived and a strong protest had been lodged against the police action and our arrest. Under pressure, the authorities released us at night, around 10 p.m.

Our campaign was not in vain. We were seeking the resolution of the Kashmir dispute and claimed that India was an occupying power. We believed that the MUF would enter the assembly and pass a resolution that would proclaim that India was forcibly occupying Kashmir and call for international intervention. This was our focus. But the Indian state did not allow a democratic dissent to happen. We were pushed into the corner. Mohammed Yusuf Shah, now better known as Salahudeen (head of Hizb-ul-Mujahideen), was originally a MUF candidate from Amira Kadal.

Not only were the elections rigged, but people were intimidated, harassed and even jailed for voicing their opinions. We felt there was no way to achieve our goals through a democratic process. We felt we needed the international community to intervene, but something drastic was needed to bring their attention to South Asia, where three big military powers held Kashmir and its extended territories in their clutches. We wanted the crisis resolved. Yet, there was no way to get rid of the Indian state. The Kashmiri freedom movement has

never stopped. There have been phases. Finally, our struggle led to an armed movement, and we decided to be a part of it.

Both Salahudeen and Showkat are now in Azad Kashmir.

4

If the MUF had won they would have raised their voices in the assembly and invited the international community to intervene. During our campaign we would hold rallies and mobilize people. We would try to make people understand the value of their vote. Earlier, most people would vote for the National Conference. Such was the sway of Sheikh Abdullah and ignorance about his demagoguery. Our campaigning was a challenge; we did not have the machinery that National Conference had, nor did we have media support. There was no Internet, no social networking sites, newspapers were few and barely reached the villages. Transport was scarce. There was no instant communication system. Few owned even radios and the programmes would broadcast outright lies and people would believe them. So, the only way out was for individuals to physically go from village to village, and talk to them about the issues facing us as Kashmiris.

We published a lot of literature in the form of books and pamphlets. People in rural areas were not very educated; so we would conduct general public awareness programmes. We were trying a mass mobilization through individual and collective efforts, and help educate people politically on the Kashmir conflict. Candidates and representatives would go to the villages and form little platforms for debate and help people understand the genuine history of Kashmir and their rights. I think this process led a great number of people towards a genuine political awakening and that was the reason for the rebellion we witnessed later. Today, show me one person in Kashmir who doesn't have a clear understanding of the Kashmir conflict. In that we have been more than successful.

We used to publicize the programme of the MUF. We would discuss how the Indian state had systematically assaulted Kashmir's identity. Its special political status even vis-à-vis the Indian Union was not spared, turning it into

just another Indian state. We would talk about how initially we had our own prime minister in Kashmir but now it was just a chief minister. This would help people understand how our position had been eroded and how India had slowly made us like any other state in its federation.

Unfortunately, none of the material we published exists any more. I remember we distributed many copies of the book *Pahadon Ka Beta* ('Son of the Mountains'). There were others too, and newspapers like *Azaan.* Pamphlets would carry quotes, information and opinions, like this:

> India is a country of some two dozen states. It has an armed force of, say, one million troops. Within these armed forces, there are huge sections or regiments belonging to particular states, regions, and even races. Hence, there are the Dogras, Jats, Sikhs and so many others. Now why is it that just the Kashmiri 'regiment' is nowhere to be seen? If they have, say, fifty generals in the army, is there one Kashmiri among them?

5

The leader of the National Conference, Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah, was considered the greatest leader who had ever risen from amongst the Kashmiris. The party was originally called the Muslim Conference and, under the Shiekh's leadership, it demanded independence for Kashmir. But later it made a compromise, whether through accords or something else, and allowed the newly independent Indian state to bring its armed forces into Kashmir. Unfortunately, people couldn't see through the real design and the Sheikh was allowed to have a free run. Slowly, Kashmir's political status as a state was compromised and Article 370 was eroded. India basically strengthened its occupation in Kashmir. If at all there were any guarantees against Indian interference in the state's politics or its political status, the Sheikh ensured that all such guarantees were made redundant. India brought its forces to Kashmir and the National Conference (NC) ensured that they never left, all for the sake of its own power. Not just that. Look at how the army used to make its barracks. They used to be temporary structures made of wood. Now they have concrete constructions. All this happened because we allowed the powerful to have a free run over us. But for such an illegal occupation, there was also a

need to maintain a facade of legitimacy. It is in creating this facade of legitimacy that the National Conference played a big role. Today the police is guarding the Sheikh's grave; that is the hostility people have towards him.

The control over our mineral resources, our water resources, our forests, our fertile agricultural land – all of it was taken away from us. Nothing was left for Kashmiris. Look at our fertile lands, which are occupied by the Indian forces. People's land has remained under occupation for generations and the owners have no say against it. If you look at the Indian Constitution, the natural resources of any state belong first to the state. What control does Kashmir have over its natural resources? Our rights as the true owners have been denied. Who is responsible for this disempowerment? I will not deny that there are many Kashmiri people who have collaborated with the Indian state and ensured India's rule in Kashmir. Sheikh Abdullah was amongst them and most of the ruling parties in Kashmir are absolutely pro-India.

During the MUF campaign, there was hardly any opposition to the National Conference. And there was hardly any opposition against the MUF other than the NC. The NC was the biggest, the most powerful political party and it was a big deal to even stand against them. We also knew that our getting into the assembly wasn't a solution to our problems. On the contrary, the assembly was part of the problem. But had the entire democratic exercise been allowed without any Indian interference, things would have certainly been different. I am sure that the violence that began in 1989 and has continued ever since would have been prevented and we would have adopted more political means.

Then the question was what the MUF would do inside the assembly. At that time – and I am talking about those days when militarization wasn't at the level we see today – the MUF wanted to pass a resolution in the assembly saying that India's was an occupational force in Kashmir. The assembly would then have been dissolved and the international community would be asked to intervene in the matter. The Kashmir issue would have been highlighted. This would be a non-violent, democratic process.[4] But I must humbly submit that India didn't understand our non-violent language.

After seeing what happened in those elections, when India did everything, including rigging, to keep the MUF out of power, we understood that they wouldn't listen to our voice. The democratic option was closed. In fact, we were left with no option at all. India proved that the only language it understood was the language it finally heard in 1989, the language of the gun.

6

After the 1987 elections, we continued to meet among ourselves. We used to discuss politics, current affairs and Kashmir's history, trying to understand how it was and remained divided between India and Pakistan, and how wars had been fought over it. We mulled over the uncertainty that people lived in. We'd meet normally – in the markets, in our homes, restaurants, fields, orchards or playgrounds. We'd meet and talk to friends and people who shared our views regarding politics and the movement. As Kashmiris, we had an identity and we wanted our voice to be heard. But then we realized that whatever we said found no resonance with the outside world, and we started thinking of an alternative approach. The system was deaf, mute and blind. No one would listen to the truth we spoke. They would reject it and label it as falsehood.

7

Imagine a stranger outside your house who doesn't allow you inside. How would you feel? We belonged to Kashmir. But Kashmir didn't belong to us. Such was the state of our mind when we decided to pick up the gun. If we hadn't occupied any people or any land, why should anybody occupy us, or our land, or our resources? What justification did they have for occupying us? There was no recourse to law. We had been enslaved.

You ask me about my own state of mind. I say our occupiers came from far-off lands; from a different culture, and a different religion. They had occupied our land and were ruling us. Why would I not revolt?

When the Dogras ruled us, we used to be taken for begaer (bonded labour). The Kashmiri Pandits would also take Muslims as bonded labour to till their land or harvest their crops and the poor Muslims wouldn't even get any wages for this. The Pandits believed that the establishment was behind them, but the Muslims had no one to turn to except Khuda (God). Everyone knows what had happened when we rose against the maharaja in 1931. Kashmiri Muslims had always been the most dispossessed and badly treated in the society.

8

Even today, Kashmiri and Indian Muslims are part of the state apparatus in the Valley. There may even be a Muslim Indian army general. There may be local SPs and DIGs here, which is fine, but look at how the Public Safety Act (PSA) is invoked. This law is draconian and invoking the PSA locally is in the hands of deputy commissioners. But when the same PSA is to be revoked, the orders are sent from the home department in New Delhi. So what good are these deputy commissioners and what powers are vested in local administration? What good is the government machinery?[5] Draconian laws continue to be in vogue. Which soldier or policeman has been brought to book for murder? Why does the home ministry or the Ministry of Defence come to their rescue? Major Avtar Singh was given an escape route right until he reached the US. How and why did the Indian state shield him?[6]

9

My comrades at the time and I all solidly agreed that the only way to get the Indian state to listen to us was an armed movement. And so, we decided to cross the LoC into Azad Kashmir, returning with arms. Before going across the LoC, we'd often talk about the path ahead and how the armed struggle would possibly affect us; we discussed all its consequences – good and bad. But once we returned and were in the field, we had to take care and defend our goals

and ourselves. For instance, if I were made the head of the militants in northern Kashmir with five or ten thousand armed boys under my command, I would have to make sure that nothing went out of control and nothing that could be deemed as 'terrorism' was allowed to happen.

It's easy to talk about it, especially in hindsight, but practically it was very, very difficult. Look at how we fight within our small homes and families. Imagine this enormous group of armed men with doctors and engineers, teachers and students, literates and illiterates, farmers and labourers, and having to carry them all as a team towards a single goal. It was very difficult to observe and monitor each person and their activities and to actually have a system of accountability. But be that as it may, our armed struggle against the occupation had begun. And the world had begun to take notice.[7]

10

I crossed the LoC in 1989 and received training in arms. I am not sure about the dates, or even the month. It was sometime between the summer and winter. We were three, and a guide. It didn't take too long, perhaps a night. Crossing over was very easy those days. Later on, it became difficult and lengthy. We walked all the way from Baramulla. We didn't know what route we were being taken through, though one initial spot I remember was a place called Qazinag. There were no villages or habitations on the way. We crossed forests here and bare hills there. It was dry throughout though you could see snow-capped mountains at some distance. There were army posts visible in some places, but we made sure they didn't spot us and we moved only at night.

In Azad Kashmir, we met a group of people in plain clothes. They had no uniforms. We didn't know the place. They took us to a rather uninhabited place and we were trained in using arms. It was a hilly area, without any human presence. We barely knew who our trainers were or where they were from. They spoke a language that sounded neither like Urdu nor Punjabi; in fact, we used to find it quite difficult to speak to them. The Afghan struggle against Russia was also raging at that time. Maybe there were people from there as well. The training continued for two to three months in various kinds

of weaponry and tactics, physical and mental. Then all three of us returned, guided by the same man who had brought us.[8]

The situation was still 'normal' when we returned. There was no violence but a war was brewing against the system. There was no concept of militant groups when we went for training, or even when we returned. Afterwards, militant groups were formed. We belonged to a group called the Muslim Janbaz Force. Later, it merged with another called the Jihad Force and became the Al Jihad.[9] People had no idea where we had been. All they knew was we had been travelling. We would tell them that we were in Delhi or something like that. But later, our families came to know.[10]

11

Once we were back, all that was on our minds was to reach our goal of azadi. The police and government agencies here were doing their work, and it was a major challenge to try and neutralize their efforts. India began to increase the level of militarization in a big way. Indian forces were deployed in operations leading to great bloodshed. Many of our friends and comrades were martyred. I was in the field for six years. We used to stay in far-flung areas at the highest possible altitudes. At times, I would lead a couple of hundred men, sometimes even a thousand. It depended on the capacity and arrangements of the place at which we would camp. I think I had led about 8,000–10,000 men. In all, I think there were 60,000–70,000 militants in Kashmir. But very few survived. The Indian state conducted brutal, systematic operations such as Operation Tiger, Operation Catch and Kill, Operation Flush Out – I don't even remember all those terms now.[11] I don't think I can say anything more than this. Whatever cases were charged against us, none were proven in a court of law, but I am still apprehensive. Anything can happen with us.

As I said, it was an extremely difficult job. We were dealing with a huge, unorganized group of people and most of them were not paid like army soldiers. They were people working without a salary, fighting out of their own conviction. Look at people who disappeared, were killed in custody, killed arbitrarily. The Indian Army did all this and this is a regular organized armed

force, the world's second largest. This is the army we had chosen to fight. It was difficult. When we were released, we were given no court documents. The police gave us a certificate. We were granted bail and the cases were closed, but it was not like they couldn't make an excuse to imprison us again. The abrogation of the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities Act (TADA) was another reason that some of the cases were dropped. If you see the first information report (FIR), there are countless things that they charge you with, irrespective of whether they are true or totally false. But later on, the charges didn't stand in a court of law. We were prisoners of war, not criminals.

12

We witnessed bloodshed. We saw our comrades being killed in front of us. We saw the dead bodies of our close associates. We saw entire neighbourhoods being set ablaze by the Indian forces.[12]

As I said, we belong to the prisoner of war category. So, if they [Indian forces] had one of our men nabbed, they were supposed to disarm them, arrest them and let a legal course of action take place and not torture or kill them. Torture is not a part of any constitution. The third-degree torture and brutality they used to practise – they were actually taking revenge against us for the armed struggle that we had waged against them. And they continue to take revenge against us. You know they have blacklisted us. Our families are not allowed a normal life. We are not issued any passports, nor given any government jobs and no necessary police verifications are provided to our families or us.

There were countless men who were caught and jailed, irrespective of whether they were militants or not. If at all they were set free, alive, they'd be left half-dead and debilitated after all the torture. Then if they managed to get back on their feet, they would have no idea of what to do with their lives. Those who had any personal or family responsibilities just couldn't manage to find any means of subsistence. In fact, most are yet to 'settle down' in their lives.

As far as we militants are concerned, there was no question they [Indian forces] would let us go. To begin with, if we weren't killed on the spot, we would be sent to various torture centres. And it would take months – even years – for us to just get out. Then we would be charged under the PSA and kept in jail.

Countless boys were picked up in cases of mistaken identities. Even they were severely tortured until the forces were convinced that they were not the ones they were looking for. The army had the option of invoking draconian laws such as the TADA, AFSPA, and so on. The forces were just not accountable to anyone and could do whatever they pleased.

13

I was tortured continuously for nearly seventeen months at various secret torture centres. Even now, I don't understand fully what they did, or why. They seemed fuelled by *dilich bhadaas* – a sense of revenge. They would say, 'Your activities are suspicious, we know this and that, we have information against you,' and then subject me to third-degree torture. This would go on for four or seven or fifteen days, or even more, and finally they'd let me alone. Then after some time, they'd start it all over again.

14

Once I was severely injured and had to go to Srinagar for treatment. It was in 1994. I had sustained a fracture in my right knee, apart from other injuries. I had traction applied to my leg for a month and a half. When I began recovering, I slowly started walking. While walking through a street, I was caught by an army patrol party who had an informer among them. The informer identified me, but couldn't identify the other person with me, who was also a militant commander. But even after the identification, they didn't really know who I was. They had some suspicions and sent me to a torture

centre at the Old Airport (army airfield). Five days later, they identified me. Then they tortured me again.

15

The Indian forces in Kashmir have many torture centres. The rooms are usually kept unfurnished, but a certain part of the floor is always kept wet. There you might find a tub of water, electric wires for giving shocks, hooks attached to the ceiling to suspend detainees, stretching equipment, belts that you normally find in band saw machines that they use for lashing. The floors are wet, so they can transmit electric current, and the shock effect is amplified. This is all for physical torture.[13]

Then there is the mental torture they subject you to, like verbal abuse and threats. Sometimes, they don't allow you to sleep and force you to stand on one leg all night, or they suspend you from the ceiling for days at a stretch. Things like chilli powder, petrol, iron rods and steel wires are inserted into your private parts. They have heavy rollers that they roll over the legs or body. These are the kinds of things they do.

All this has been done to me.

16

What haven't I seen in those prison chambers! We'd be taken to the torture rooms and you'd see blood all around. We'd help each other after being tortured. People would return from sessions with their muscles ripped open, and we'd massage them with some ointment or medicine. I remember when they would insert chilli powder in our private parts. We used a plastic container filled with water and would help each other sit in that water to cool the burning pain. There was nothing more we could do.

17

There are thousands of torture victims in Kashmir. There's hardly a home, or neighbourhood that hasn't witnessed torture. People have been tortured in their homes, playgrounds and schools, just about anywhere. Even today, torture continues to be used as a weapon. It is widely believed that 2008 and 2010 decisively changed the course of the pro-independence movement in Kashmir, moving it from an armed to unarmed struggle. But as I said, torture hasn't stopped. There are draconian laws that continue to be in vogue here, such as the AFSPA. Kashmir is far from being a normal place. There has been no decrease in the level of militarization and the armed forces continue to be granted the immunity they have always had.

And torture continues. However, the army may be a bit cautious when it comes to leaving any visible signs of torture now. Many human rights groups are working against this practice and the media is watching too. But that does not mean it doesn't happen, it is just well covered up.

But has all this torture worked? Have people stopped speaking the truth? No. We had injuries and scars on our bodies due to torture. And we have forgotten those injuries. They are healed. But the scars on our souls, we cannot forget them.

18

I was in jail for three-and-a-half years. I was released in 1998. But even afterwards, I was arrested repeatedly and tortured again and again. As I said, there was never any real purpose for either the arrests or the torture.

Once we were released, we had no idea of what to do. I was trying to get back to normal life, set up a shop, or start a business. But the state was after us, blackmailing, extorting and doing other such things.

My family had a piece of land and I tried to start a fruit business. But the state didn't allow it and I was repeatedly arrested and tortured. My choices seemed to be to either pick up a gun again, or just leave the country and run away.

I saw the need to raise my voice against brutality again and chose the path of human rights activism in 2007. In that year, I met Parvez Imroz, who is a

renowned Kashmiri human rights defender, and his associates. And during conversations with them, this whole idea of starting a human rights group against torture came up.

Once I began to raise my voice against torture, a lot of other people who had been subjected to the same treatment joined me. If there are any new cases of torture, our organization tries to highlight the issues and bring some relief, solidarity and support to the victims. The organization is called 'Voice of Victims'. We just released a report that found that 471 torture centres still exist in the state. Anti-insurgency operations continue to take place, people continue to be detained and arrested. Perhaps the intensity of torture and the extent to which it is practised have been reduced. But it has certainly not stopped.

There are difficulties still. One only faces problems. But you have to do the work. You can't let the situation be as it is and leave the victims to their fate.

The government supports and defends the people who are involved in murder and the most brutal atrocities. Our responsibility is to expose them and let the world know that they are murderers and that the establishment is on their side.

19

Going back to the question of Tehreek, our first priority was to internationalize the issue. We have succeeded in that. The nations of the world are talking about us at some level. Of course, there is no guarantee of any time frame within which the Kashmir issue will be resolved.

Looking back, nothing has changed as far as our politics are concerned. We have not and never will abandon our Tehreek. We have sacrificed all we had for it. So, wherever we find something that we can do to help it, we do it. We try to do peacefully what we once did by strength of arms. Whenever one of us human rights activists speaks somewhere, the foremost concern is the movement. We have sacrificed all we had, be it our wealth, or our lives. We have sacrificed our dignity and respect. Our lives have no value in comparison to the movement.

And the goal? The goal is independence. We haven't achieved it yet. But until we do, our struggle continues peacefully.

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11

The Vernal Interlude 1989

Mir Khalid

My fascination with Srinagar's upper City Side began as a child whose infantile attention was incorrigibly drawn to the allure of the City Centre bustle, its shops and famous bookstores, record shops and movie theatres running the best and the latest hollywood flicks, but above all the pleasant sights and smells pervading the environs of my maternal granddad's sprawling estate. My grandfather's old bungalow and its lawns, where I spent some of my time, were a remnant of his one-time power and affluence. A 10-foot tall guelder rose tree stood alone on the verdant lawns dotted with cypresses and evergreen shrubs, interspersed with peach and walnut trees. The guelder rose tree was my favourite in his garden.

My earliest memories are of me skittering around the lawns, chasing hoopoes and scattering guelder petals. My pre-school life was spent here in my grandfather's home and not my father's downtown Safa Kadal house as my young mother was unable to cope with the exigencies of a newly nuclear family's homemaking chores and two hyperactive kids so close to one another in age.

The wider city with its many outsized characters and idiosyncrasies could well have drawn the envy of Pamuk's Istanbul in times of yore. A ride from downtown to the City Side negotiated not only the many PIN codes but also the mutually disdainful indifference borne by variant self-images, opinions, social registers and general outlook that separated these two antagonistic

swathes of Srinagar. My parents – a quintessential downtown lad and an uber-uptown girl – saw their marriage traverse strong accentual and cultural differences endowed by the city's geographical determinism. The downtowners, in my mum's opinion, were innately imbued with ritualistic tribalism and an insular, parochial lot given to intrigue. In comparison, her City Side kindred were congenially open-minded, usually polyglot, straightforward and more aware of the world.

In time, I retained mum's City Side inflection to my spoken vernacular if not her opinionated judgements providing me a vantage view to experience both ends of the city. This access allowed me to form a rich tapestry of varied memories and associations that have withstood the vagaries of time.

1

Even as the vernal equinox of 1989 turned, I was a pimply teen dating a high school basketball star and harbouring dreams of running the 'Thousand Lakes Car Rally' in Finland someday. My friends and I painted the Srinagar roads red in my deep blue family sedan. Emblazoned with Union Jack stickers, its stereo bellowed chartbusters by George Michael, INXS, Iggy Pop, Midnight Oil and Van Halen. In that idyllic high, it never crossed our minds that in a few months' time our dearly beloved city would mutate into both the crucible and front line of an intense insurgency. The intractable conflict would make the nooks and corners of the wider Vale morph into infamously ungovernable environs resembling Northern Ireland or El Salvador on steroids, claim tens of thousands of lives and shred our social fabric to bits.

2

In the first week of April 1989, my grandfather died quietly in his sleep. We rushed to my mother's house in Mandar Bagh, a relatively quiet suburban sliver – straddling the tough Maisuma and Basant Bagh neighbourhoods – abutting the City Centre. Here was where the wake and requiem rituals would

take place. That week preceding the year of the outbreak of insurgency would memorialize itself with ominous portents of troubled times ahead. The City Side, hitherto considered less volatile than downtown, exploded in violence, which often lasted days.

Under the shade of my beloved guelder rose tree, I reminisced about the life and times of Amir Muhammad Khan, my grandfather. In our infantile imagination, his retinue of exploits, his addictive proclivities towards adventure, horses and guns in the Vale expanses and beyond made him appear as some aged John Wayne doppelgänger. He had introduced me to literary Urdu, Persian poet-chroniclers like Farkhi Sistani, and European historical figures through snippets he would relate now and again. In public, Mr Khan had been a daring second-generation police officer who retained his tall, imposing figure even as he aged. His career had hurled him into enviable positions and allowed him to be an unwitting first-hand witness to the many harsh historical upheavals the Valley had endured in the twentieth century.

Even as the wake and bereavement visits continued inside our hearth, uncontrollable violence broke out outside. I am not particularly sure what triggered it on that spring afternoon. The area had been on tenterhooks for a year, when many demonstrators protesting the supply of fungus-ridden wheat and increased electricity tariffs had been shot dead by trigger-happy policemen.

I watched with trepidation as the crackling sound of bullets and bursting tear-gas canisters rent the air. One shell struck a home opposite ours, injuring a girl watching the upheaval on the Gaw Kadal bridge. Venturing outside, I saw the tough neighbourhood lads – some of my acquaintances and friends among them – sporting hyped up antagonistic glares, their slogans breaching the air. From three sides, they began raining rubble and roughing up the riot-police posse at close quarters.

The City Side precinct's violent propensities had in the past created street-fighting legends. It surprised no one to see these lads unleashing lethal violence on a level unimagined by the perpetual 'stone in hand' downtown counterparts. The disturbances saw police vehicles set on fire and liquor shops laid waste around the City Centre. The mayhem soon spread through the rest

of the city and scores of demonstrators sustained bullet injuries in violent confrontations with the police.

In this melee, the young wife of an elder cousin's childhood buddy – an intrepid ironmonger with matinee idol looks – rushed into the house. The dishevelled woman told us of policemen shooting her husband while he was pelting stones in the nearby Basant Bagh area. My cousin, a recent medical graduate, rushed to the hospital to be at his bedside.

Of the many boys who died in the conflagration was Ashique from Maisuma locality across the bridge. A tormented twenty-something, Ashique had already endured recurrent prison confinements for being an affiliate/member of the Islamic Students League. Though we never had any social interaction, his had been a familiar face ever since he had helped a posse of the local 'City Side Boys' gang while still detained at the notorious Kothi Bagh sub-jail.

These student gangsters had been interned after a massive switchblade-and-knuckleduster assault at the suburban Broadway Cinema left many black marketeers badly injured. The gang members forcibly entered the auditorium and were watching the opening show of the then debutant Aamir Khan–starrer *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak* when police raided the precincts and arrested them.

Spared a thorough body check, they were still carrying weapons on their arrival at the Kothi Bagh sub-jail. The recovery of those weapons could have meant stiff jail sentences. Ashique had listened intently as these neighbourhood boys blurted out their predicament; given his resourceful nature, he had the knives and knuckledusters stealthily removed through his contacts. However, his own luck ran out a few months later.

During a lull in the rioting, Ashique had sauntered out of his home, ostensibly pausing to shake hands with an on-duty police official he had befriended during his incarceration. At that very instant, a hand grenade targeting the policemen exploded, killing Ashique on the spot and badly injuring the officer.

A page had turned, but the graduation from pure stone pelting to grenade throwing hadn't been abrupt. To stymie the intensity of the protests, the policemen frequently resorted to midnight knocks and arbitrary arrests.

Consequently, a lot of harassed youngsters seething with vengeance increasingly blew off their steam by street-fighting police pickets. The frisson created by the Kalashnikov rifles stashed in neighbourhood attics by friends and acquaintances hopping back from Pakistani arms training camps congealed into a confidence that fuelled a militant backlash on the streets.

On the Friday requiem, rioting swept the whole city again. From and to the downtown cemetery, a couple of our cars had their windshields battered. Two of my cousin's friends loitering in the downtown Buhyr Kadal area came across a previously unthinkable situation: Two masked men brandishing AK-47s shooting up police columns sent in to disperse stone pelters, forcing the latter to flee the scene. In a show of revelry, elated citizenry showered the gunmen with confectionary.

Relegated to a corner of the house, I wondered how my grandfather would have viewed this scene of violence. I still remember Dad and the extended family elders sitting on his spacious porch, talking. Since 13 July 1931, the date and year that Grandpa mused over repeatedly, the cycle of violence had never ceased. That was the day Kashmiri protestors, prodded by the incendiary declamations of Qadeer Khan – a Pathan butler incensed by the treatment meted out to the hapless populace by the Dogras – discovered the power of stone debris.

They recalled Grandpa speaking of the 1930s and 1940s, of how, while discharging duties as a station house officer at the city's Kothi Bagh or Sher Garhi police stations, he repeatedly and distastefully tackled anti-monarchist demonstrators. While he preferred resorting to '*tiktiki*' – mass whipping of detained demonstrators – in full public view to dissuade others, many a time the monarchist Hussars would spike and maim fleeing protestors. One night, Grandpa came home after a hectic day to find his younger sibling dazed and wounded, his arm slashed by a Dogra soldier's sabre. Fifty years later, not much had changed.

3

Two decades on, I arrived in Dublin primed mentally and physically to be an attendant observer of upheavals raking the world. Little did I know that Bono's city would bring me answers to the many questions I still had about what had happened on the City Side streets in 1989.[1]

Dublin, a city of leafy promenades and the bridges, is much smaller than most other European capitals. The Liffey flows right down the middle, cleaving the city into the North and South embankments, much like the Jhelum does for Srinagar. During my residency in the UK, I had encountered politically apathetic Brits oblivious to their colonial past. On the contrary, the Irish turned out to be very aware politically and proficient raconteurs of their chequered history.

Every year, thousands of visitors come to Ireland from across the world, drawn by the allure of the 'Old Country'. The Dublin cabbies dish out their rather standardized sightseeing kitty. They point out the humungous pockmarked General Post Office building, the scene of Irish Nationalists' last stand during the failed 1916 Easter uprising. They regale tourists with accounts of the Irish wars against the British; the role of Churchill and De Valera; the exploits of the Irish war hero Michael Collins and his 'twelve apostles', the Cairo gang. They drive you in to the Castle and Kilminhaim Jail, a source of repressive misery and setting of the opening scene of the Michael Caine hit movie *The Italian Job*.

Interacting with the Irish in general will impress upon any visitor that their repeated insurrections stemmed from vicious British attitudes and policies that led to infamous famines and forced cross-Atlantic migrations and the iniquitous laws made to remind the Irish of being not just a subjugated but a defeated people. My interests went beyond the superficial perusing of Irish history through anecdotes. I read deeper to discern that to this day, in contrast to the atheistic secular confines of Europe, the Irish notion of nationalism is deeply intertwined with strident Catholicism. This curious Hibernian ethno-religious loyalty was the basis of their rallying cry against the British and continues to structure Irish nationalist discourse.

After the Irish Republic came into being in 1921, Irish Catholic communities in the North cleaved off from the rest of the Irish isle and

continue to be oppressed. In 1969, the wider Catholic insurrection spearheaded by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) commenced in earnest, claiming thousands of lives.

Within liberated Ireland, the communitarian political mobilization had given rise to another subset of political parties and ideologies such as Fianna Fail, who were prone to be more right wing and somewhat more extreme in their politics than the leading political formations like Fine Gael, whose overarching presence they actively aimed to replace in the Dáil Éireann's ruling benches. It struck a chord with me, reminding me of what I had seen back home.

4

It was 1977, I think, and I, a child of a couple of years, running around the garden egging my aunt (also my foster mum) to catch me. This was when a bearded young man entered the driveway and came into the garden. He wanted a couple of the guelder roses. My aunt assented and so the chap picked up a bunch and left. Sometime later, as my aunt led me to the neighbourhood stationery store, we found the Gaw Kadal–Habba Kadal road clogged with hundreds of people. We stopped out of curiosity, and in a few moments, an open carriage passed by. It carried a smiling Sheikh Abdullah, waving his hands at the people. There was a retinue of cars and supporters shouting slogans, whose wording now seems erased from my memory. The child that I was swiftly noticed the two guelder roses adorning his achkan, which I guessed had been sourced from our tree.

My aunt divulged the happenings to Grandpa, who was sitting as usual on the big porch working his *Mar Paech*[2] and exhaling plumes of tobacco smoke.

It would be many years before I learnt that Grandpa saw the popular Abdullah as an odious figure, repeatedly dismissing him as an impetuous man whose stature had been built by peddling a mythologized version of his role in the Vale's recent history. Grandpa saw Abdullah as a self-centred demagogue and blamed his short-sightedness and naivety for much of the violent mess and uncertainty in the state. It would be years before I learned that my grandpa's

antipathy dated back to the Jammu pogrom of Muslims in 1947, whose aftermath he had witnessed first-hand.

Operating from the Peer Mitha precinct in the heart of Jammu, my grandfather's efficient handling controlled the blood-curdling situation, earning him plaudits. But on the flip side, the local Dogra organisations ran a concerted campaign seeking his removal from the scene.[3]

On the other hand, the sea of humanity that formed Sheikh Abdullah's funeral cortege and flagellated themselves in grief in 1982 seemed to see him as some deified leader. Abdullah's voluble exposition of peasant-socialism politics and the halo of living martyrdom endowed by his long incarceration stirred the hearts and fogged the minds of his followers so much that his shifty stands and 360-degree turns did little to dampen their support. Their repeated hagiographic utterances around the shopfronts and faucets lining downtown and Safa Kadal in particular portrayed Abdullah as a benevolent patriarch whose relentless struggles guaranteed their dignity and alleviated the sufferings of the Kashmiri Muslims.

Years later, walking around the topiary-laden Dublin suburbs, it hit me again. Much like the Irish nationalists, the Kashmiri political project melded republican politics with the assertion of ethno-religious identity as an organizing basis. In 1931, Abdullah midwifed this by blending the dreamy quest for definitive Kashmiri nationhood by resting its political pivot on assertive confessional identity.

Abdullah achieved this through repeated displays of showy confessional piety, interspersing Quranic verses into his speeches, and bandying about themes of victimhood and injustice. This saw him harvest raw political support from an overwhelmingly Kashmiri Muslim base and morph into an overarching patriarch of Kashmiri politics and masses, successfully leading a sweeping mobilization. But at the same time, much like the Irish and Ulster Catholics, this exposition of confessional identitarianism awakened the sense of dignity of the Kashmiri Muslim masses enough to prompt them to aggressively seek the justice hitherto denied them by the Dogra feudocracy.

In the following decades of upheaval, this political ideation would come to define notions of Kashmiri patriotism strictly within the rubric of ethno-

religious loyalty. But whether Abdullah ever countenanced this or whether his self-image and the clumsy tackling of its long-term ramifications by his successors would become a key factor in destroying his earned stature and place in posterity is debatable. What his followers themselves didn't realize was that ideologies or sentiments are hardly subject to rise and decline secondary to someone assuming to be its embodiment. Abdullah was a man of his generation and his mass appeal and authority couldn't have lived beyond its time. When his persona got shop-soiled, or when the metaphorical clueless kids wanting a hard-headed father figure morphed into their opposite in the next generation, the dyslexic generational exchange encouraged ominously shocking portents.

What I witnessed on the streets of the City Side in 1989 was perhaps the contentious claiming of the legacy of that 1931 ethno-confessional political assertion Abdullah had helped spawn. The City Side youngsters sought a violent reclamation as well as redefinition of their claim. Having been denied the one chance to be its new heirs, they saw violence as a means of political progression. They were actually the Vale's Fianna Fail; furthering their claim on the mantle of a renewed Kashmiri Muslim political assertion, envisaging a culturally bonded ethnic-confessional group resuming its quest for what they saw as a denied political identity, melded with an overarching control of specific territory by effectuating it on the streets.

5

But there was another jarring note of a different history long neglected. My Grandpa repeatedly harped on the persuasive coercion that Abdullah perpetuated after 1947. Abdullah saw himself as an embodiment of Kashmiri redemption after years of feudal exploitation, but at the same time, his peremptory nature exacerbated his aversion to carry its real burdens through consensus. He tried legislating a sociocultural, economic and educational transformation, but found it difficult to become an absolute ruler. Though his hero worship within the constituency he considered his own – the peasant class

– was secure, he could never get along with urban educated segment in Srinagar.

His thorough lack of imagination saw him failing to venture beyond the narrow triptych of personality cult perpetration, arbitrary repression against pro-Pak opponents and dishing out patronage to his nomenklatura. For him and his unrepentant Bolshevik-minded followers, violence was an effective, easy option to get on with the affairs of running the state and get out of the conundrum ingathered from the partial failure and partial success of his contradictory dreams.

These proclivities could be only sustained through abuse of power, which was well-nigh impossible without disenfranchising people. But who were these dissenters? Apart from the pro-Pakistan lobby of Maulvi Yusuf Shah, who had been consigned across the LoC through self-exile early on, there were many educated men who had previously rallied under National Conference's ethno-religious identitarianism banner but hadn't come to terms with his watering down via accession to the Indian Union. Abdullah's defiance of the two-nation theory, born of his proximity to Nehru, seemed ironic and illogical to these educated men. Many were recent pass-outs from Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) a pro-Jinnah bastion at the time. This cohort saw Nehru as representative of the overlordship of a Hindu state not very different from the previous Dogra monarchy. It is debatable whether Abdullah's Indian leaning was driven by the exigencies of the aftermath of Partition, plain naivety, conviction or pragmatism. The Indian state would avowedly resist the prospect of another Muslim nation state congealing in its entirety.[4]

Abdullah's grip on the polity wasn't uncontested. The dissenters witnessed his 1938 changeover, which saw the Muslim Conference being renamed the National Conference. They saw this as a conceptual trespass but vying to hitch the Kashmir wagon to Indian state made them decry Abdullah as a traitorous comprador who had succumbed to the cunning and artifice of Nehru, a seasoned politician. Student delegations handed visiting United Nations official's memoranda, calling for a plebiscite. There was an assassination attempt in 1951 that saw the arrest of the two main plotters, Kashmiri law graduates Muhammad Ali Bhat and Ali Naqvi. Hemmed on one side by

dissent, many of the opposition figures were exiled across the LoC. For Abdullah's Bolshevik cohorts, there was no room for engagement with this educated class.

Abdullah was powerless to put a check on Nehru's efforts to essentially bring the Kashmiri state fully under Indian sovereignty. Nehru and the Indian establishment seemed averse to Abdullah's idea of accepting the definition of the Jammu and Kashmir state as one with an essentially Muslim character. To this end, he pestered Abdullah to follow up on the state's full amalgamation with the Indian Union without seeking new 'terms of endearment'. In the absence of cast-iron constitutional guarantees, this step would have put paid to Abdullah's ambitions of ruling an autonomous Muslim-majority state with a strongman like him at the helm.

In August 1953, Nehru's nationalist compulsions saw Abdullah dethroned and imprisoned. To squelch any potential uprising, his successor Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad institutionalized a repressive template on an industrial scale. He tried sounding Grandpa out as a hatchet man, an enforcer of a malignant version of socio-political control meted through his Peace Brigade toughs working in cohort with the police. Grandpa's outright refusal saw him relegated to non-functional duties before being prematurely retired.

Abdullah's Plebiscite Front reverted to ethno-confessional discourse to press for the Kashmiri right to self-determination. This persisted till 1975. Now ageing and ill, Abdullah buried the hatchet through his agreement to forge an accord with the Indian political establishment. The Plebiscite Front, having endured twenty-two harrowing years, trimmed their ideological sails much like their Great Leader, and followed him on this propitious journey.

This emotional upswing saw the NC cadres renew their addiction to a sense of violent righteousness. Even as the 1977 election got under way, Abdullah, like the ever-overarching medieval seigneur habituated to tribute but not opposition, oversaw his storm troopers as they mounted a very violent riposte to the political challenge posed by the then Mirwaiz Moulvi Farooq. An orchestrated political pogrom, branding the Mirwaiz and his supporters as Indian stooges undermining consensual Muslim unity, set the whole of downtown on proverbial fire.

On the City Side, no such thing happened. There was no 'other' with the temerity to hitch his wagon to the ruling Janata Party's efforts to derail Sheikh Abdullah's re-election effort here. However, I do have a faint recollection of my grandfather conversing about the brutal thrashing meted out to the Congress candidate Dr Jagat Mohini, who ran the popular Rattan Rani Hospital a half-furlong away from our Mandar Bagh house.

6

Ashique's repeated incarcerations are a case in point that proves how contentious Abdullah's political legacy was. Maisuma was a particularly contrarian pocket of the City Side area and had fervently supported Sheikh Abdullah and his NC from the beginning. Unlike the Downtown's bakras (as the followers of Moulvi Farooq were called) who despised Abdullah and saw everything in terms of perpetual victimization, the City Side had no grisly addendums, rifts and rivalries vying for Abdullah's place. The lives of this working-class area's older generation spanned Kashmir's turbulent history and had their collective imagination bidden to the NC brand of politics in the twentieth century.

Abdullah's ratchet shift in his politics and the 1975 accord were seen by City Siders as a self-mutilation of the Kashmiri denominational political sentiment. But their sentimental allegiance to their leader and the ideological dead freight they had carried for two decades saw them unable to reorient themselves politically and decisively. Within a decade or so, their children, the Genext, whom they had suckled and weaned on their twenty-two years of 'political vagrancy' – read anti-Indian sentiment – came of age at a very propitious time during the late 1970s and early 1980s.

The tumult of the late 1970s – the Iranian revolution and Red Army's invasion of Afghanistan – had stirred the imaginations of these youngsters on university and college campuses. Even as a kid, one couldn't miss the mention of new undercurrents, especially downtown, where this Genext increasingly decried their hesitant elders as doddering fools who had been done in by their leader.

Times had changed since Sheikh Abdullah had sung a redemption song and led indentured serfs. These youngsters scoffed at the cheap irony of the NC's ubiquitous red posters with 'the great leader' portraying himself as a stand-in for Hindu-Muslim-Sikh unity. His previous espousals of the right to self-determination while opposing the coercive policies of the Indian state had been carried out from the Hazratbal Mosque pulpit, and were too big an irony to miss.

Ashique's Islamic Students League (ISL), and its contemporary Muslim Students Federation (MSF) in particular, professed assertive religio-centric identity politics of an avowedly irredentist kind, much like the 1930s vintage ethno-confessional political discourse. Formed on the Kashmir University campus in the early 1980s, ISL founder Shakeel Bakshi tried enforcing gender segregation and an overly Islamic atmosphere among the students. Later, his theocratic phase saw Bakshi restarting the annual Milad-un-Nabi[5] procession, utilizing it as a vector for identitarian assertion.

The early 1980s also saw arrests of university students who, according to police, were carrying out or planning acts of sabotage. The generational change hadn't struck Abdullah's stagnant self-image; given their revanchist appeal of seeking renewal of identitarian politics adumbrated within overly Islamic overtones, he decried this new breed of dissenters as interlopers on his political franchise. Unlike their parents, this new generation of straight talkers was no longer bemused by cliché-ridden politics spewed by what they saw as unimaginative windbags. Their success, in their view, definitely held the potential of not only weakening Abdullah's hold on power but most importantly, rewriting his political legacy out of existence.

In July 1980, Indian soldiers, riled by the thrashing of one of their drivers after an accident, ran amok and rioted in Srinagar City Centre. Abdullah's seeming powerlessness to control it and the subsequent praise of the Indian Army as protectors at a public rally was widely decried by his detractors as a geriatric travesty, and by his assenters as a betrayal of his core Muslim constituency. For many observers, these riots and the reaction to them were a watershed moment that exposed Abdullah as a redundant general whose conceit and vanity had mistakenly led him to believe that he still embodied the

people's sentiment and commanded their support while leading an emasculated, senile regime.

7

Abdullah had always warned of explosive situations and usually disparaged the new generation 'interlopers' as Indian agents. Instead of engaging them, all he could offer was to send them bouncing from one prison to another while offering his elder son Farooq Abdullah – whom the renowned leftist Tariq Ali described as being 'not very bright' – the sceptre of succession.

Farooq Abdullah came to power in 1982, riding the goodwill that the masses had for his father. NC supporters welcomed him and, given their quasi-filial romantic loyalties, portrayed him as a star, a heroic reflection of his illustrious father. However, his reign was less than tranquil. The Central government, acting through a pliant governor, inveigled the elected representatives and upended the popular mandate. Dismissing his government through a mix of intrigue and chicanery, Jagmohan foisted Ghulam Muhammad Shah, Farooq's brother-in-law and a restless pretender, to the post of chief minister. The common people's tones appeared incensed. The authorities clamped down a curfew to forestall a violent backlash, but to no avail.

According to an old hard-core NC worker, at an informal meeting at the party office after his removal, Farooq Abdullah ruled out following in his father's footsteps, that is, launching a plebiscite agitation or anything that posed a risk of incarceration. But even as Farooq washed his hands of the workers and decamped to enjoy less serious pursuits, the youngster lot roused the city into protests and came out on the streets.

Widespread disturbances ensued in the city, including in our Safa Kadal locality. For days on end, demonstrators rained rubble and havoc on the police phalanxes. In much of downtown, protestors were shot and killed. The police not only beat the arrestees badly but also publicly stripped scores of them as a punitive measure before detaining them for months on end. I remember the

bleeding welts on the back of one of my uncles, who was severely belted by policemen in front of our house for his display of defiance.

Underneath the surface though, a subtle change in the air became palpable. I was still a pre-teen and watched the bands of brickbat-hurling young men up close. These were the stone-pelting mob's mobile vanguard bound by college student fraternities, with their defiance and anarchist behaviour patterns ostensibly untrammelled by the repressive measures. These boys fired up by some inexplicable fury, led the mobs from the front, rotating through various downtown neighbourhoods, sometimes opening new fronts by rushing to curfew-bound trouble spots by canoeing across the Jhelum. The lads would be seen carrying trophies: police batons and belts, helmets, shields, khaki caps snatched from policemen who suffered the ill luck of being cornered by them.

Within Safa Kadal, I saw many of them graduate to Molotov cocktails in violent confrontations with the police, who to them symbolized corrupt unrepresentative power. Years later, even as the insurgency erupted in 1990, I came across at least one of the Molotov cocktail pelters, this time patrolling a downtown street with a gleaming Kalashnikov clutched firmly in his hand. Not many older people could discern the generational change or the mood of the young protestors and the disquieting political shifts. Old school patrimonial types overlooked the very divergent rationale behind the then youngsters' overt attempts to radicalize the consciousness of the younger cohort by indulging in extreme anti-state violence on the streets. Like many others, the NC cadre mistook their ferocious rhapsodies not as attempting a final break with their older generation's politics, but as fervent support for the grand old political party.

Even as Governor Jagmohan dismissed the Shah administration in early 1986 and promulgated laws against consuming meat on Hindu holidays, widely perceived as skewing the professional exam lists to favour minority Kashmiri Pandits, and came down on demonstrators with a vicious force, it was hard not to miss the street-side elders and youngsters emphasizing his work as an Indian state gambit to extend its successful reversal of historical norms that now stipulated repressing Muslims to an inferior level, as the broader aim of its latent policy in the Valley.

8

The right-wing Jamaat-e-Islami's office in Srinagar used to be situated right in the middle of a nondescript lane in Maisuma, a furlong away from the ruling NC office in Gaw Kadal. It didn't have many local recruits but was more of a nodal point for its rural-based party's cadres arriving in the city. The Jamaat's political mobilization in 1970 saw them venture forth and indulge in an experimental courtship with what was then popularly seen as a cynically manipulated polling exercise that won some seats, as well as the ire of the NC. Sheikh Abdullah, still vying for a plebiscite, never forgave them and as soon as he came to power, designated the Jamaat as Enemy No.1, proceeding to emasculate it by closing down its schools. When Bhutto was hanged in Pakistan, the NC cadres laid waste Jamaat-sympathizing villages in south Kashmir.

The Jamaat affiliates made a contesting bid in the March 1987 elections against the Farooq Abdullah–Rajiv Gandhi combo, and foremost among them was Mohammad Yusuf Shah, later known more by his nom de guerre Salahudeen, the de facto head of Hizb-ul-Mujahideen militant group. But the watershed point was reached when the City Side student organizations, including ISL and MSF, acquiesced to throw in their lot to support the MUF candidates within both Downtown and City Side constituencies.

To this end, the 1987 elections saw the youngsters' unprecedented political mobilization as an alternative vox populi. These lads were wary of the patronizing shrugs and smiles of the shop-soiled NC or their cohorts. In street after street, the MUF workers emphasized the threat to Kashmiri Muslim identity, and ethno-religious assertion became a rallying point against Farooq Abdullah. The photographs of Farooq Abdullah sporting vermillion marks on his forehead, or his temple visits were exhibited in a bid to expose him as someone who couldn't be trusted to safeguard the assertive form of collective political heritage.

It was grey and raining on that fateful March day when elections were held. The canvassing youngsters' feelings of resentment and dislike denounced

the previous generation for being blind to what the Abdullah family and its ilk had wrought in the Vale. Political lines pitted fathers against sons and nephews against uncles, neighbours against neighbours. In Maisuma, the election day turned violent as MUF supporters made a serious effort to prevent bogus voting. Seeing the extent of polarization and antagonism of the young voters, the NC polling agents tried scuttling the vote and in one bizarre incident, the son of an NC bigwig stabbed the MUF chief polling agent.

In what came to be viewed as a massively rigged election, the MUF won only four seats. Many observers surmised that the MUF would have mustered not more than a dozen seats in the eighty-odd-member assembly, but the rigging gave them a new lease of life as victims. Instead of finding a middle ground, the new government could only muster noxious provocation. In massive repressive measures, hundreds of MUF activists as well ISL and MSF cadres were charged under the notorious Public Safety Act and jailed without trial. ISL never recovered from this and shrunk away, ceasing to be a cogent force in student politics.

A few brave NC workers were astute enough to feel the ground slip beneath their feet. Their wised-up utterings were drowned in the cacophony of victory dances. Farooq Abdullah and his circle of passionless and flat-footed lackeys lacked the counterpoint of their ideologically intent opponents, who took pride in the bigger struggle for the Kashmiri political identity. The repression had only emboldened them.

On Eid-ul-Adha festival day in 1987, even as thousands of people including myself gathered for the collective festival prayer, truckloads of MUF workers descended on the Eidgah grounds. The Eid day and the Eidgah venue had for years been a converging and canvassing spot for NC's religious tokenism, and Sheikh Abdullah in particular had mingled with the masses and sometimes led prayers. The MUF workers' rampage disrupted the gathering. As the imam was manhandled, Farooq Abdullah thought it better to skip the prayer and leave the venue.

Little did anyone know that this, the heightened antagonism between Kashmiri society's many layers, would exact a future price, opening a new

chapter of political turmoil full of pathos and terrifying violence that would both interlock and mangle many lives and fates in the years to come.

9

Standing astride the O'Connell bridge's balustrade on a balmy summer afternoon in 2012, I hit the eureka moment and saw through the paradox that till now had seemingly escaped the grasp of both journalism and recent history. It became paramount that I revisit my memory and the City Side area to gain a perspective from the many people I had seen fighting in 1989, many of whom had been insurgents and spent time in jail. I would have to do this to get an idea of how a generational shift produced such a cataclysmic upheaval in Kashmir. My revisit was enlightening, to say the least.

In a de-provincialized provincial place, the individual and his self-realizing quest could willy-nilly have been expressed only as part of a community image, offering absolutely no place for those who abhorred being defined by the same. Propelled by political tensions and instabilities, the new generations' radically different collective egoism made them assertive janissaries, the new vanguard subconsciously laying a revanchist claim on the 1931 sentiment.

This new generation couldn't just be derisively dismissed as malcontents, given the assertive ethno-confessional mores that had been so ingrained within their society's DNA through anti-Indian political mobilization by Sheikh Abdullah. This sentiment's claims to a distinct, non-subcontinental particularism kept the society on edge. The MUF workers' action in their view was a message that the Abdullahs and NC had forfeited the right of representation by compromising on the struggle on the key question of self-determination. Their situation had transmogrified a violently disruptive claim on the symbolism of identitarian political legacy in downtown and the City-Side belts, the heartland of support for Sheikh Abdullah, and they were teetering on the edge of a violent revolt which in its first stage sought physically rooting out NC's claim and appeal from rank and file.

Farooq Abdullah was grasping at straws. By the summer of 1989, he had relocated to the Hazratbal Mosque where his misdirected bombast threatened

denizens with breaking the shutters of their shops for their temerity in adhering to mass strike calls. Many felt he wanted to hasten his own undoing.

Perhaps he too surmised that these protests and protestors would in time eat their humble pie, passed over by history, adding another pentimento on Kashmir's political canvas. But the times were different. A hundred odd miles as the crow flies, the Soviet Red Army was being beaten twig and branch by the raggedy Afghans, and the Pakistani state was the main conduit of this war. It was perhaps a dint of circumstance or plain chance that under Gen. Zia's patronage, the Jamaat-e-Islami of Pakistan was one of the most powerful non-state actors involved in this war.

10

The LoC, an eccentric line dividing semi-impassable ragged terrain drawn approximately near the lateral third of the Vale's western wing in 1947 by the UN, marks the Indian- and Pakistani-controlled areas along their ceasefire positions. By the 1980s, it had largely realized its main objective and ceased being the escape hatch for dissenters fleeing to Pakistan by restricting movement. Through laws, fences and guards, the Indian state had successfully compartmentalized and isolated the two sides socially, politically and economically.

In early 1988, even as the four MUF legislators tried out boilerplate denunciations to force the government to listen, young Jamaat sympathizers with hard-line nationalist self-images crossed the LoC. These first recruits to the arms training camps organized by the Pakistan Army comprised rural and suburban Srinagar lads, including Bilal Siddiqi, Aijaz Dar, Ashraf Dar and Abdullah Bangroo. This opened the floodgates for the mass departure that reached its peak in the 1990s. Thousands made the journey and thousands died.

It was a sultry mid-September night of 1988. The signal event heralding the insurgency saw its many leaders, led by Aijaz Dar and consisting amongst them notably of Maqbool Ilahi – another pioneer militant who later became one of the founders of the Hizb-ul-Mujahideen group – launch an assault on

the heavily fortified residence of the deputy inspector general of Kashmir Police. The botched raid ended abruptly and resulted in the death of Aijaz Dar. The state responded with war-like swiftness and scores of insurgents who had gone across the LoC were arrested, and others unable to bear the heat scurried back to Pakistan to cool their heels and to regroup and start anew.

Back in the Valley in mid-1989, after another round of disturbances, Srinagar had come back to some degree of normality. I was about to witness an incident that would indelibly imprint itself on my memory. Having paused my car, I was waiting my turn at this famous traditional kulfi joint at downtown's Buhyr Kadal bus stop. Glancing around, I watched an ice-cream vendor ask a smoking youngster to steer away from his handcart. In response, the young man brutally roughed up the vendor. The locals intervened and broke up the fight. One vociferous man repeatedly reprimanded the assaulter, shouting, 'You want to end up in jail again? You were released this morning and this is what you get into!' Someone remarked that the lad had been picked up during a night-time raid by the police as part of their intensified harassment campaign but let off without charge a week later, but not before he had been soundly thrashed.

Why was this generation so politicized? Some imaginary line had been crossed, especially by those who witnessed or were victimized by the crackdowns of the late 1980s. Their radicalization saw them cross some Rubicon, which no Cassandra could have possibly prophesied. In retrospect, I could only surmise with such frustrating elements around, and an insurgency already under way, that the wheels of Kashmir's history had started revving their pace and grinding faster.

Epilogue

In the winter of 2012–13, I was back home, on and about loitering the City Side and the Gaw Kadal bridge area. I intently listened to the now middle-aged acquaintances, smart and determined veterans of those yesteryears' street agitations and the insurgency.

These greying friends, some wearing hooded denim jackets, others in quilted tartan shirts and jeans to fend off the cold, dry wind that chilled up the atmosphere down to our bones, looked like doppelgängers of Bruce Springsteen's Philadelphia video *Avatar*. Their weather-beaten looks, furrowed faces and intense expressions made up for their serious demeanours, which abhorred victimhood labels. They discussed families, their children and the future, the challenges posed by their past and adjusting to suburban relocations.

Surprisingly, after their stints in street fighting, insurgency and prisons, none of them had ventured into the overground separatist polity, nor vied for a place as players or claques. Listening to them and their profoundly grounded ethno-religious-denominational motivations one could figure that the 1989 spring was a watershed point in a way. Their ideations seemed literally like leafing through UCLA historian Perry Anderson's *LRB* Partition essay,[6] given the concurrence between his studied opinions and their views. These former insurgents that I spoke to, derided the pro-India political groups and dispensations ruling the state as unrepresentative and forcibly inflicted on the local populace. In their opinion, the uninterrupted disturbances and political entropy afflicting the Vale since 1947 were a direct outcome of the indiscriminate use of force by the Indian state to muzzle protest and dissent against the indelible humiliation inflicted through political disenfranchisement. These hostile policies and browbeating of the Kashmiri populace, in their view, stemmed from the denominational identity of the Indian state – its innately confessional 'Hindu' character – which in their opinion is inherently irreconcilable and mutually antagonistic to the Kashmiri – specifically Kashmiri Muslim – political aspirations.[7]

Back in the 1980s, many of these lads putting their own futures at stake had sought self-realization through extreme political imperatives, defined by a meld of ethno-religious kinship and
AK-47 guns, to mount a violent challenge to the Indian state. Breaking the monopoly of state-inflicted violence using AK-47, on behalf of themselves and others would, in their view, alter what they saw as an unfavourable political status quo. This inevitable cataclysmic confrontation would, in their opinion, end the poignant inadequacies of political engagement that the previous generations had encountered.

The advent of Kalashnikovs in 1989 had provided the battle space with new militantism and its lead elements coming to the fore. The decks were being cleared for a headwind to blow, wherein revanchist para-militarism could gain a proximal place in Kashmiri political consciousness. Within a few weeks in January 1990, this militarist section of Kashmiri society had staged an effective coup d'état on the pro-India dispensation, rolling over Sheikh Abdullah's presumed heirs and sending their Shangri-La of patronage systems crashing like a house of cards. The insurgency campaign, predicated by the 'sentiment' of daring the power of the Indian forces by targeting them and, by extension, the Indian rule in Kashmir, commenced in earnest.

Twenty-five years later, these City Siders, original veterans of the conflict I sat around with, had an astute grip of the situation; they weren't politicians but serious attendant observers. They confessed they hadn't surmised then the rapidity with which the idea of political para-militarism morphed into a source of national pride for their constituency: the Vale's populace who proffered unconditional support for the war effort and suffered its consequent vagaries. The erstwhile claimants of the ethno-confessional sentiment had successfully claimed the power for themselves, but that wasn't the end of it.

The confessional politics and its leadership make its way into the hands of these militarist sections who, in their view, weren't prepared enough to handle the political ramifications. According to them, there were other hitches; the inherent dynamics of the insurgency transcended state boundaries, gaining the Pakistani state an unprecedented physical access and influence in the Vale unimaginable before. It was no longer a bystander staking claims dating back

to 1947 and content with peddling rhetoric on world forums. On the flipside, the Pakistani establishment couldn't extricate themselves from their whims of viewing Kashmir and the conflict as anything else than another arena where the primacy of their India-centric military-strategic interests mattered more than anything else. This agenda imposed its own limitations on the Kashmiri engagement with the political part of their project. I realized, listening to this declamation, that no wonder no overarching political figure like Martin McGuiness or Gerry Adams could emerge in that situation.

As I mouthed this loud thought, these City Siders poignantly pointed out that the leadership thrown up by the cataclysmic events had been unimaginative; they went back to reprise the Plebiscite Front tactics, their idea of leadership was giving rousing speeches to a sea of humanity at Hazrabal Mosque and raise slogans; these guys had no idea that a sea change had occurred within the social environs since the 1950s and '60s. The Indians, on the other hand, actively sought to suborn and coerce them to the extent that many of them got shop-soiled.

The situation led to other ramifications that had never crossed anyone's minds. As an example, my old friend told me, stamping out the Abdullahs from the political scene was part of the script; but after a few years, the counter-insurgent lads' fratricidal campaign created a situation that saw the former stage a comeback. Who could have thought, he further elaborated, that the platitude-spewing mediocre sort Mufti Sayeed, who never had any political support base, would one day rule the state? But civil wars always have chancers lurking around, he commented dryly, strategic strivers whose vested interests manage to make most of the conflict.

That was a very cynical view of the whole thing, I interjected. Not really, others spoke up, opining that the physical and social cost of the violence suffered by the wider populace propelled the dynamics of this political mobilization to a renewed, confessionally grounded nationalism that has over time acquired not only a definitional clarity but actively sought its own independent agency which went beyond beating the drums of racial and cultural separateness. The mass agitations of 2008 and 2010 are a pointer, the first one declaimed, that the Genext has laid the claim to the 1931 ethno-

confessional sentiment. These particular numbers oscillated in my mind; there was no emotive harping on dates – 1931, 1947, 1953, 1965, 1971, 1977 – one usually encountered in downtown Srinagar.

As the winter sun went down, I took their leave and walked back to my Mum's ancestral house across the bridge, gleaning a look on to the grounds of my Grandpa's house, I looked around to find it forlorn, shorn of the trees I had so adored; the deaths of an entire middle generation and overseas migrations had taken its toll.

I ventured into the home of another aunt who lives next door. She led me into her drawing room, even as she prepared tea, I couldn't help but go through old family albums. One of them taken in 1951 featured my grandfather in full uniform, brass stars and buttons, baton and all, sitting on the chair with Grandma, with my Mum and aunts standing around. He had been a first-hand witness to the July 1931 events, from then on, as he had said decades ago, the Vale, the people, the ideas and the politics would never be the same again, which was quite prescient of him.

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NOTES

1 Bono is an Irish musician, lead singer of the famous band U2.

2 Mar Paech: Hookah with a rubber-tube pipe rather than bamboo.

3 For more details on Jammu pogrom, see Copland, I., *State, Community and Neighbourhood in Princely North India, c. 1900–1950*, London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005. Also see Snedden, Christopher, *The Untold Story of the People of Azad Kashmir*, Columbia: Hurst Publishers, 2012.

4 See Lamb, Alastair, *Kashmir: A Disputed Legacy 1846-1990*, London: Roxford Books, 1991. Also see Noorani, A.G., *The Kashmir Dispute 1947-2012*, Toronto: Oxford University Press Canada, 2013.

5 A holy day commemorating the birthday of Prophet Muhammad [editors].

6 Anderson, Perry, 'After Nehru', *London Review of Books,* Vol. 34, No. 15, 2012, 2 August 2012, pp. 21–36, https://www.lrb.co.uk/v34/n15/perry-anderson/after-nehru (accessed on 29 September 2018).

7 Conversations with former insurgents. For more discussion on this, please see Khalid, Mir, *Jaffna Street: Tales of Life, Death, Betrayal and Survival in Kashmir*, New Delhi: Rupa Publishers, 2017; and Anderson, Perry; 'After Nehru', *London Review of Books*, Vol. 34, No. 15, 2 August 2012, pp. 21–36.

12

How I became a Kashmiri Rebel in India

Syed Zafar Mehdi

THE day I was born, my hometown Srinagar was under a stringent curfew imposed by the Indian authorities. My mother often flippantly tells me that it was done to greet another child of conflict. It was a frosty winter day with snowflakes descending from heaven. The stage was set for my grand arrival, but the soldiers manning the streets and the inclement weather conditions almost played spoilsport. My mother tells me how many Indian soldiers, carrying automatic rifles, metal rods and tear gas canisters, blocked the streets. Movement was restricted and vehicles were barred from plying on the road. Battling excruciating pain, my mother struggled to reach the nearest hospital. I had almost died before I was born, my mother often reminisces.

For many years, I was swollen with strange pride over this dubious distinction, but that was before I realized that many of my childhood friends had also been born on days of curfew. We were the children of conflict, born in the mid- to late 1980s, when the sentiment of freedom from India was fast gaining momentum. To crush the popular sentiment and browbeat the Kashmiri people, the Indian state employed various draconian and repressive measures. Young or old, men or women, none was spared by the military witch-hunt. Children as young as three years old were introduced to ominous terms like ‘curfew’, ‘crackdown’, ‘Kalashnikov’, ‘encounter’, and ‘interrogation’.

I have terrifyingly vivid memories of growing up in the Kashmir of the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the armed rebellion was at its peak. As a child, I was besotted by the sprawling meadows in Gulmarg, the trout-filled streams of Pahalgam and the beautiful shikaras (canopied boats) that floated on Dal Lake. But my childhood, like that of my friends, was not normal. The trials and tribulations started early and caused a great deal of emotional and psychological pain. Ours was a perennial struggle for survival; a murder of innocence.

The Kashmir of our childhood was like a beautiful bride abducted by a ruthless beast. Every day, this bride would be subjected to physical harassment and emotional torture. Her heart-rending ordeal, for some ludicrous reason, was totally disregarded by the international community. Unlike what some self-proclaimed historians would like you to believe, this ordeal did not start in the 1980s or '90s. It began soon after the partition of erstwhile British India. My grandmother tells me how Indian forces came into the state and refused to leave.

As I grew older, I began to understand the import of Grandma's stories. My personal experiences during the early 1990s reinforced my belief that the freedom struggle was not a futile exercise. Those who sacrificed everything to fight the Indian forces were doing us a big favour. Dying with honour, as my father often told me, was better than living as a slave. My thoughts on this have not changed in all these years.

I remember stumbling against a barbed wire fence and injuring my leg while passing an army camp. I remember being admonished by a gun-toting soldier for not carrying an Indian identity card while coming home from school. I remember standing in a long queue behind my father during a military crackdown and helplessly watching a veiled mukhbir (informer) identify 'suspected' militants. I remember holding my uncle tightly after he had been mercilessly dragged around and interrogated for his alleged links with militants. I remember my friend and classmate proudly telling me how his father had heroically laid down his life, fighting the Indian forces. I recall how bullets and bombs killed our people and destroyed our land. I remember how all hell broke loose in front of our eyes.

The situation went awry in the early 1990s when the Indian state upped the ante and began to use indiscriminate force to quell protests. The Indian political machinations ensured that young Kashmiris were forced to take up arms in their quest for freedom. Many of my friends, who had faced some degree of harassment and torture at the hands of Indian forces, dropped out of school and crossed the border into Pakistan to be trained as militants. All of them had legitimate grounds to revolt. It was a full-scale uprising spurred on by the tornado of resentment against the occupational forces.

I was barely five when the Gaw Kadal massacre took place on 20 January 1990, a day after New Delhi sent Jagmohan, who is notorious in Kashmir as a 'ruthless hate-monger'. The Indian forces opened indiscriminate fire on a crowd that had been protesting the ruthless crackdown in downtown Srinagar where women had also been molested. The troops mowed down at least 200 Kashmiri protestors. In her book *Kashmir in Conflict: India, Pakistan and the Unending War,*[1] Victoria Schofield calls it the 'worst massacre in the history of Kashmir'. It was followed by the Zakoora massacre on 1 March 1990, when thousands of protestors marched to the office of the United Nations Military Observer Group in Srinagar to protest the policies of the governor. At least twenty-six were killed in the army firing. The Tengpora massacre took place on the same day, when the Indian Army at a bus stop in Tengpora, Srinagar, killed twenty-one people. Kunan Poshpora, a small hamlet in north Kashmir, was rocked on 23 February 1991, where at least fifty-three women were gang-raped by the Indian security forces. Two decades on, there has been no action taken against the accused soldiers from the fourth Rajputana Rifles.[2]

This gratuitous brutality further stoked the flames of rebellion among us Kashmiris. Azadi became a war cry as millions rallied behind the mujahideen. As days passed, the mazar-e-shuhada (martyrs' graveyard) in the heart of Srinagar filled up. Families did not wail over dead bodies, but felt immensely proud. The bodies of martyrs resting in those graves became an inspiration for my generation. The burden of sacrifice was heavy and the stakes were high. There was no question of letting down those who had given their blood for our beloved nation.

Shutdowns and curfews were common in those days and schools would remain closed for weeks and months together. My studies were affected, which was a matter of concern to my parents. Like most of my friends, I was losing interest in my studies and, instead, wanted to join the militant ranks. I was ready to sacrifice my modest dreams for a bigger cause. But before I could flee my home, I was dispatched to a boarding school. Ironically, it was in a bustling city in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, famous for Aligarh Muslim University. I recall looking down from plane at the fleet of sand bunkers juxtaposed with green, agricultural fields. I waved my hands and pledged to keep Kashmir in my dreams every night.

The journey from Kashmir to India, from occupied territory to occupying state, transformed my life and stirred my political consciousness in a way I had never imagined. I was barely twelve, but my unapologetic political beliefs, which I had assimilated deeply, surprised many of my classmates and teachers. My father, like any concerned parent, had instructed me to avoid stirring the hornet's nest. 'We are all entitled to our political beliefs but don't argue or fight with anyone,' he told me. His words echoed in my head but I found it difficult to remain tight-lipped, especially when the topic of discussion veered to Kashmir and Kashmiris' right to self-determination.

For a twelve-year-old, debunking the statist narrative with robust arguments was both a challenge and a self-designated responsibility. The hours of intense reading and writing on Kashmir, arguments and discussions I had with my classmates and teachers, veiled warnings I used to get for showing dissent helped me grow beyond my age. Political maturity, I realized, does not come with age; it comes with daily experiences. For children of conflict, politics runs in their veins and political lessons are part of their overall upbringing. I made some good friends in the boarding school and some of them were hard-core nationalists. We spent many nights discussing Kashmir, India and Pakistan and ended up agreeing to disagree.

My day would start with newspapers, which often carried stories with horrifying details of young boys mown down in cold blood and young schoolgirls gang-raped in frontier districts by soldiers and members of disbanded government outfits. The spin doctors of Indian media, however,

cunningly obfuscated the facts to keep their Indian readers in the dark. As the years passed, I began to understand the policies of India and how the Kashmir policy was flawed.

I was living a free life in India, but the fact that my brothers and sisters in Kashmir were denied that freedom by the very same state was something that haunted me the whole time. Every time I got a call from home, the news would be of cold-blooded murders, rapes and enforced disappearances. It affected my studies, even though I tried hard to follow my father's instructions.

One fine morning in March 2000, as I was getting ready for school, our hostel warden summoned me. To me he seemed like a cross between Farooq Abdullah and Mufti Sayeed, two Kashmiri pro-India politicians of dubious distinctions. He would scare the daylights out of us residents. This was long before cellphones became a fad, so we used to get calls on the hostel telephone. It was my cousin calling from Kashmir, and talking to him always buoyed me up. Known for his sense of humour, he would often call to cheer me up and wipe away my homesickness. This time, he sounded strangely grim. A day before, on 20 March 2000, almost fifteen army personnel had entered a village called Chattisingpora in Anantnag district in south Kashmir. A total of thirty-four men belonging to the minority Sikh community had been lined up in an open field and shot dead. This had happened on the eve of the then US president Bill Clinton's visit to India.

I was fourteen and my cousin a year older and we were discussing the political conspiracy behind the Chattisingpora massacre and the possible identity of the perpetrators. The hostel warden, who was seated in his cosy chair right across from me, was leaning forward to hear our conversation. There is something fishy about this whole incident, my cousin insisted. I hung up and rushed to the morning assembly. As always, it commenced with the Indian national anthem and everyone sang along in unison. That morning, I was outraged and wanted to give vent to my irrepressible anger. I refused to sing the anthem that praised my tormentors. After the assembly dispersed, a teacher walked up and politely reprimanded me for being 'anti-national'. I did not react.

On 15 August that year, a local politician unfurled the Indian tricolour and all the boys marched to salute it in a show of national pride. I stood my ground and walked away. I was reminded of the famous Howard Zinn quote, that there is no flag large enough to cover the shame of killing innocent people for a purpose, which is unattainable. Saluting a piece of cloth, whether you identify with it or not, is no big deal, but when the same piece of cloth is stained with the blood of innocents and used to mask the horrendous crimes committed against people, it becomes a big deal.

Five days after the Chattisinghpora massacre, I came across a news report that stated the seven foreign militants behind the massacre had been gunned down in Pathribal village of Anantnag district. After school hours, I took permission from the hostel warden and went to a telephone booth outside campus. I called my cousin to find that he was equally flustered by the news reports. The real perpetrators were being shielded and innocents being made scapegoats, he told me in choking voice. There was a line of people at the booth and any one of them could have been a spy. Kashmiris in India have to exercise great deal of caution. It takes mere suspicion from Indian security agents to arrest Kashmiris and force them to confess to crimes they have not committed. After many attempts over the years to cover up the horrendous crime, in 2012 the Indian Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) said the seven men killed in Pathribal were innocent civilians and the officers involved 'were cold-blooded murderers and deserve to be meted out exemplary punishment'.

Incidents like the Chattisingpora massacre left an indelible impact on my mind. The dance of death continued in various forms and shapes. The sense of fear and vulnerability was overpowering. Young boys would leave home for a game of cricket and never return. People would be abducted from their homes and dragged to various interrogation centres for third-degree torture. The traumatized families would run from pillar to post to find out the whereabouts of their loved ones. The xenophobic Indian media would block any news that could possibly invoke the outrage of liberal Indians, thus sacrificing objectivity at the altar of jingoistic rhetoric.

Quite often, we had heated arguments in the hostel dormitory on why Kashmir was not 'integral part' of India, or even the 'jugular vein' of Pakistan

for that matter. I had to remind my friends of Jawaharlal Nehru's solemn promise made in Lal Chowk, Srinagar, in 1947, where his friend Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah had flanked him. I had to remind them of the resolutions passed by the United Nations on Kashmir and how successive regimes in New Delhi had made a mockery of them. I had to remind them of the thousands of Kashmiris killed in the last two decades of conflict. I had to remind them of fake encounters, custodial killings and more than 8,000 cases of enforced disappearances.[3] I had to remind them of boys who never came home. I had to remind them of children orphaned and women widowed. I had to remind them how occupiers occupy land, hold people hostage and yet claim the occupied territory as 'integral part' of their ideal.

Often, the reaction of my friends and teachers would be amusing, and almost border on the outrageous. 'What do Kashmiris want?' was the question frequently tossed at me. The answer was simple and straightforward, but the venom of jingoism made it unfathomable to them. We don't ask for the moon or the stars, we just want to breathe free air, I would gently assure them. My arguments were seen as 'seditious' and dangerous to the 'sovereignty' of India. The question of the right to self-determination, explicitly mentioned in the UN resolutions, did not sit well with them, which exposes India's forced claims on Kashmir. If India is so confident, it should allow a referendum under the supervision of a neutral body, I used to tell them.

Those days, we used to anxiously wait for summer vacation to go home and catch up with friends and family. The moment the bus passed through Jawahar tunnel, which marks the entrance to the Kashmir Valley, my eyes would light up and the feeling of homesickness would fade away. But the sight of sand bunkers and gun-toting soldiers was nauseating. For the record, Kashmir happens to be the most militarized zone in the world, something the tourism and travel agents never tell tourists. With more than 600,000 troops currently deployed in the Valley, it is indeed a 'beautiful prison' as famously noted by a European Union delegation in 2004.[4]

Coming home was like entering a cage filled with befuddled humans. Every time I returned, the first thing I would do was inquire after everyone's well-being. Once I went to see a close friend to gift him a shirt I had bought in

Delhi. With tears rolling down her wrinkled face, his mother told me he had vanished under mysterious circumstances. She wanted to know if he was alive or dead. I wonder now if she were asking for too much.

Coming home meant experiencing the horror first-hand. On one such occasion, while I was home for summer holidays, I realized how truly vulnerable we were. I had heard stories of Indian troops ransacking houses and thrashing people for no reason in the frontier districts of the Valley. This time, it was much closer and the target was my home. It was past midnight and we were fast asleep when somebody started banging on the door. My brother woke me and we rushed out to find a posse of armed men taking position in our lawns. They had jumped over the wall, almost 15 feet high. Without a warrant, some of them stormed inside and rummaged through everything. They checked my desktop computer and sifted through my school notebooks while flashing their automatic rifles left, right and centre. My parents were terrified and I was wondering what had gone wrong. I tried to ask one of them and he almost shot me. After nearly an hour, they left with just a few words: 'We got wrong inputs.'

We didn't sleep that night. We could easily have been victims of yet another fake encounter and passed off as foreign militants, as it happens in remote districts, far from the media arc lights. That fateful night I realized what kind of unbridled powers these men had under the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA). It is far too easy for them to kill and get away with it. The immunity from legal action has saved them over the years as they continue to unleash a reign of terror on hapless people. Lack of prosecution creates a culture of impunity, as noted by many international human rights bodies, but the occupiers remain unfazed.

When I narrated this story to my Indian friends in boarding school, they were in utter disbelief. It could never happen to them because they were not the children of conflict and didn't live in an occupied territory under the spectre of draconian laws. My family was lucky that night, but there are hundreds of families in border districts who lose their sole breadwinners when they are kidnapped during military raids and killed in custody. Their loved ones keep waiting, expecting a knock on the door in the middle of the night.

After spending five years in boarding school, I moved to New Delhi to study journalism. There, I saw another hideous face of the devil and realized that the whirlpool of terror for Kashmiris was not limited to Kashmir. In India, Kashmiris faced music of a different kind. There were many cases in which Kashmiri journalists, academics, businessmen, artists and students were abused, vilified and targeted by the state and its agencies. Syed Maqbool Shah was seventeen when the Delhi Police in Lajpat Nagar arrested him in 1996 in connection with the Lajpat Nagar bombings of 21 May 1996. After spending fourteen years in Tihar jail, he was released in April 2010 for 'lack of sufficient evidence'. Mirza Iftikhar Hussain was arrested in Bhogal in June 1996, also in connection with the Lajpat Nagar blasts. He was also released in April 2010 after thirteen years, ten months and twenty-five days, for 'lack of sufficient evidence'. Shakeel Ahmad Khan was arrested in April 1992 in Lajpat Nagar for allegedly plotting to kill Bharatiya Janata Party politicians. He was released in August 2002 after serving nearly ten years behind bars, again for 'lack of evidence'.[5]

I have both personally as a Kashmiri and professionally as a journalist analysed these cases threadbare before arriving at the conclusion that it was difficult to be a Kashmiri in the capital city. The government, however, does not represent the only threat. Right-wing forces, with overt and covert support from security agencies, are a bigger one. The workers from right-wing groups interrupt almost every seminar, rally, sit-in demonstration or public meeting on Kashmir. At one seminar on Kashmir in Jamia Milia Islamia University, the hostile audience, comprising mostly right-wing hoodlums, created a ruckus and stopped the proceedings. At a peaceful sit-in to condemn the execution of Afzal Guru, a Kashmiri medic sentenced to death in the Parliament attack case 'to satisfy the collective conscience of the society', young Kashmiri students were attacked by a mob of venom-spewing right-wing forces, in the presence of police officials. Life had begun to get difficult for Kashmiris outside Kashmir as well.[6]

One event that will remain etched in my memory for a long time was the seminar 'Azadi: The Only Way', at Delhi's LTG (Little Theatre Group) Auditorium in October 2010. I remember the goose pimples I got when the

auditorium came alive with thunderous slogans of azadi, even though right-wing trouble-mongers tried hard to disrupt the proceedings. After the seminar, both Kashmir's top separatist leader Syed Ali Geelani and prominent writer-activist Arundhati Roy were slapped with sedition charges, but the political establishment, cutting across party lines, was shaken to the core. This is the power of resistance shown by Kashmiris.

Kashmir has seen many tumultuous social and political changes since the mid-1980s, but one thing that has remained constant is the overwhelming desire for freedom and peace with dignity. The transformation from armed struggle to a peaceful grass-roots movement shows the tremendous maturity of a people who have grown weary of war and violence, death and destruction. But this change has been reciprocated with more despotism and tyranny by India. Occupying land and holding people to ransom to the idea of India has become the standard operating principle of successive regimes in New Delhi. That, however, has not dampened the spirit of the Kashmiri people. The young generation of Kashmir is politically more aware than the youth in any other part of the world.

The events of the 1990s influenced my generation, and the events taking place now are likely to influence the next. If that happens, India will be digging its own grave in Kashmir. The 2010 uprising, for instance, made the international community sit up and take notice when bullets were showered at teenagers protesting the horrendous crimes committed by the occupational forces. Many were arrested and thrown behind bars under the draconian Public Safety Act and many more were booked for 'seditious' posts on social networking sites. That is how the state muzzles the voice of dissent without realizing that they are not doing themselves a favour.

The writing is on the wall: No matter what the Indian tourism ministry claims, peace and normality are a far-fetched dream unless the political aspirations of Kashmiris are respected. Contrary to what self-anointed political analysts in New Delhi would like Indian masses to believe, it is not about political or economic packages or cosmetic confidence-building measures. Kashmir is about the right to self-determination, and the right to not be occupied and subjugated. The resounding war cry on the streets of Kashmir is

for azadi, complete freedom from the spectre of oppression, humiliation and occupation. That is what I notice whenever I come home.

Today when I look back, I think the decision my parents made to send me to a boarding school in India was a good one. Rather than suppressing me, it made me politically informed and aware. Having to constantly defend my position and being the Kashmiri 'other', I understood what I was and what I stood for. Endless arguments with my Indian friends on why Kashmir remains a disputed territory occupied by more than half a million troops reinforced my belief that the key lies in resistance. Kashmir's martyrs have taught the younger generation that standing up for our rights is the only way.

We the people of Kashmir wake up every morning to resist. We write to resist. We speak to resist. We live to resist. We breathe to resist. This resistance will someday bring down our occupiers. To invoke our beloved poet Agha Shahid Ali, we shall meet again in Srinagar, by the gates of the villa of peace, our hands blossoming into fists, till the soldiers return the keys and disappear.

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NOTES

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3 See Mathur, *The Human Toll of the Kashmir Conflict*, 2016.

4 The Committee on Foreign Affairs, Human Rights Common Security and Defence Policy of the European Parliament issued the Report of its Ad hoc Delegation on 27 July 2004. The delegation visited both sides of the LoC.

5 In February 2017, three Kashmiris, including a man named Mohammad Rafiq Shah, who was picked up from Kashmir University were released from Tihar jail innocent of all charges after twelve years [editors].

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EDITED volumes are known for becoming drawn-out processes. This edited collection too bore such travails and also faced the challenges of natural and political calamities in Kashmir. We had to bid goodbye to some writers who lost their essays in the floods of 2014, and wait for others to begin writing anew after the deluge. For a native Kashmiri, writing about Kashmir is full of challenges. While the Kashmiri voice has been a constant since India and Pakistan became two independent nations, outside Kashmir it has not been a heard one.

The process of retaining the narratives as recorded, especially to amplify the oft-undermined political history of Kashmir was a challenge. We are grateful to our contributing writers who have been infinitely patient while we together overcame the challenge creatively. Each one of the authors has been a model of humility, grace and generosity.

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Our families, friends and children who are looking forward to the book being finally published deserve appreciation for their unwavering confidence in the project and its cause.

About the Book

'Here are stories, memoirs and insightful personal histories from a wide range of people about growing up in Kashmir during the Troubles. Reading this book made me wonder how any government and, indeed, how any people can feel pride in committing such atrocities and forcing such indignity on a whole population. It manages to be a primer as well as a sophisticated analysis, which is no easy task. I hope it will be widely read.'

ARUNDHATI ROY

The accession of Kashmir to the Indian Union in 1947 had raised objections both in Kashmir and India, echoes of which continue to be heard even today. At the time, Sheikh Abdullah was the uncrowned king of Kashmir; today, his grave is under security lest it be vandalized. What accounts for this change in attitude?

A Desolation Called Peace provides important insights to understand the political aspirations of the people of Kashmir and the change in their perceptions since Independence. Written and edited by Kashmiri authors, this collection of ethnographic essays explores the desire for 'azadi' as a historical and indigenous demand. While the accounts traverse the period from before 1947 to the momentous time of 1989 when militancy began, the essays illustrate how postcolonial politics has impinged on Kashmiri lives and

aspirations, thus paving the way for the intractable dispute of today. This anthology of deeply felt essays will enable an understanding of Kashmir beyond the hackneyed tropes that portray the issue reductively as a proxy war, terrorism or a simple law and order situation.

About the Author

Ather Zia is a poet and political anthropologist who teaches at University of Northern Colorado, Greeley. Ather is the author of *Resisting Disappearances: Military Occupation and Women's Activism in Kashmir* (Washington University Press, 2019) and co-editor of *Resisting Occupation in Kashmir* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018). She is the founder editor of Kashmir Lit (www.kashmirlit.org), an ezine that is publishing writings on Kashmir since 2008. In 2010 she helped co-found the Critical Kashmir Studies Collective (www.criticalkashmirstudies.com), an interdisciplinary network of scholars working on the Kashmir region.

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